

SOME IMPORTANT
CASES of CONSCIENCE

ANSWERED,

AT THE

CASUISTICAL EXERCISE,

On *Wednesday* EVENINGS,

In *Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate-Street.*

By S. PIKE and S. HAYWARD.

Pfalm xlii. 11. *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the Health of my Countenance and my God.*—

2 Cor. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the Faith, prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be Reprobates?*

V O L. II.

L O N D O N:

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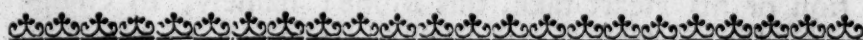
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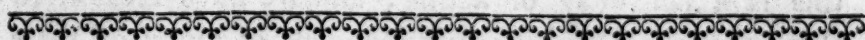
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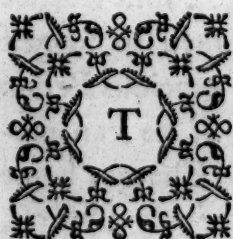
C O N S C I E N C E .



C A S E XIII.



How may we distinguish the Suggestions of Satan from the Corruptions of our own Hearts?



HIS Question is taken into Consideration in Consequence of a Letter lately received, wherein it was put almost Word for Word. And certainly it is of great Importance, that a Question of this Nature should be seriously and solidly answer'd, in order to prevent some very uncomfortable or very delusive Mistakes, which different Persons are apt to run into. For there are some, who awfully deceive themselves by casting all their Sinfulness from themselves, and charging it upon the Devil; while there are others who frequently distress themselves unnecessarily,

A

cessarily,

cessarily, by laying to their own Charge *all* the Evil which they feel in themselves. The *unrenewed* Person is most apt to run into the former Mistake, while the *serious Christian* is most ready to indulge the latter. Those who know not the Plague and Corruption of their own Hearts are certainly in great Danger of deluding themselves; while those who see their own Sinfulness and Corruption are frequently under a Temptation to distress themselves. The carnally secure Person, when he has been carried into some Enormity, which galls his Conscience, or damages his Reputation, is strongly inclined to seek after all Manner of Excuses for himself; and among the many Methods which the Pride and Corruption of his Heart take, this is one; namely, to charge the Fault upon Satan, in order to discharge himself from it, and ease his Mind under the Guilt of it. But surely this is a sad Way of acting; and we have Reason to think that the Devil is verily innocent of many of those Things which are laid to his Charge. But we find the serious Soul is of a contrary Disposition: Knowing himself to have all Manner of Sin in him, he is therefore apt to charge himself with almost every Thing: From whence it appears, that it is one Artifice of the Devil to suggest evil Thoughts, and then to persuade the gracious Person that he is chargeable with them; and, if he can prevail upon the poor Believer to take those Charges home to himself, this produces the most melancholy Distress, and has a Tendency to drive him to Despair. And I doubt not, but many gracious Persons have been brought almost to the very Borders of Desperation, by being inclined to charge themselves with what was not properly their Sin, but was only their Affliction.

The foregoing Thoughts make it appear very evident, that this Question should be attended to with great Diligence.

gence. And if I can be a Means of giving a satisfactory Solution to the important Query, it may, by the Blessing of God, be a happy Means of rousing the carnally secure, and of comforting the distressed Believer.

In order therefore to introduce a proper Answer to this Question, it will be needful to premise two or three Things.

1. *That our own Hearts can tempt us to the worst of Sins, even without the Concurrence of the Devil.* There is nothing too bad, vile or abominable, for our corrupt Hearts to suggest to us: For our Saviour tells us, that *out of the Heart proceed evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Blasphemies, and the like, Matth. xv. 19.* And the Apostle James confirms this awful Truth, by telling us, *James i. 14, 15. That every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed.* So that there is great Need to be attentive to, and watchful against, the first Risings of our depraved Nature.

2. *That Satan may suggest evil Thoughts to us, even without the Concurrence of our own Hearts.* This was indubitably the Case with our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though perfectly free from Sin, was tempted to the vilest Iniquity in the Wilderness, as is recorded *Matth. iv. 3—10.* And thus it was likewise with respect to our Mother Eve, when Satan made his first Attack upon her. And I doubt not but this has been the Case with many true Believers, as will be made evident in the Sequel of this Discourse.

3. *That sometimes both Satan and our own Hearts concur to produce the same evil Thoughts within us.* Sometimes our own corrupt Hearts are first in the Sin; and then we may be said to tempt the Devil to tempt us. Thus it was with the Corinthian Converts, *2 Cor. xi. 3. I fear lest by any Means, as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his*

Subtilty, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ. For we find that these *Corinthians* had been preferring one Gospel Minister to another, by regarding the Oratory of Speech, and by having itching Ears. This, it is evident, was their own Fault; and from hence we find, that Satan takes an Handle to draw them off from the true Simplicity of the Gospel. At other Times Satan is first in the Evil, by suggesting wicked Thoughts to the Mind, which are suited to our Nature and corrupt Disposition. He takes Advantage of our Circumstances and Temper, and then our Hearts readily fall in with the Suggestion; and so we are beguiled and betrayed. And in many Cases Satan and Corruption so concur together, that it is difficult to know which is first, or which has the greatest Influence into the Sin committed, or the Corruption indulged.

But I apprehend that by the following Rules we may in some Measure know, that Satan has the chief or only Hand in the Temptation.

I. When the Temptation is *unnatural*, or contrary to the general Biass or Temper of our Minds. We know that every Person has a Disposition to some Sin more than others; and this is the Sin which most easily besets us, as it arises from our natural Temper. Now observe, when a Temptation falls in with this Disposition, it is difficult to know whether it arises from Satan, or ourselves: But sometimes Persons are tempted to what is directly contrary to this general Biass. In the former Case, we ought to be very cautious, lest Satan should get Advantage of us, and we be ignorant of it: But, in the latter Case, it is very evident, the Temptation must be chiefly or only from the Devil. We have a remarkable Proof of this in *Peter*, who was rather inclined to an *overheated Zeal* for Christ and his Cause; and yet we find him

him betrayed into the contrary Sin, namely, the *most abject Cowardice*; which we find expressly ascribed to Satan, *Luke xxii. 31. Satan hath desired to sift you as Wheat.*

2. When the Temptation is *opposite* to the present Frame of the Mind, then there is Reason to think that Satan has a Hand in it. The Soul of a Believer, we know, is in very different Frames at different Seasons; being sometimes more carnal, and at other times more spiritual; sometimes more comfortable, and at other times more dejected. Now, if a Temptation falls in with the present Temper of our Minds, it is very likely our own Hearts have the chief Agency in it. For Instance: If when we are in a comfortable Frame we are tempted to Presumption, or if in a dejected Frame we are tempted to Despair. Not but that Satan may have a great Influence even in this Case, though more undiscernible; as we see in the *Corinthian Church*, where we find that the Church was brought into an utter Defestation of the Sin of the incestuous Person: But Satan takes Advantage from hence to drive them into Extremes, to swallow up the excommunicated Person with over-much Sorrow; which is ascribed to the Devil, *2 Cor. ii. 11. Lest Satan should get an Advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his Devices.* On the contrary, it is very apparent, that Satan has the chief Hand in the Temptation that runs counter to our present Frame. For Instance: If profane Thoughts are injected into the Mind, when we are in a devout Frame; or if presumptuous Thoughts come in, while we are in a disconsolate Frame; or despairing Thoughts are injected, when our Minds are in a comfortable and spiritual Frame. In either of these Cases, it seems evident, from the Nature of the Thing, that Satan has the chief Influence.

3. When the Temptation itself is *irrational*, being contrary to whatever we could imagine our own Minds would suggest to us; here is Reason to think that Satan has the chief Agency. As supposing a serious Christian is tempted to disbelieve the Bible, or to call in Question the very Being of a God, or is hurried on towards some unnatural Crimes; such Circumstances as these are plain Intimations, that the Cause is rather the Temptation of Satan, than our own Corruptions.

4. When a Temptation is *detested* in its first Rising or Appearance, it is a Sign Satan has the chief Hand therein. For when our *Hearts* tempt us to any thing, the Temptation is attended with a secret Delight at its first Rising, because it is suited to our Natures and Wills; and we cannot but feel a Pleasure in the Suggestion itself, because it proceeds from ourselves. But when an injected Thought is abominable in our Sight, and detestable to our Souls, at its first Appearance, and is an Affliction and Burden, rather than a Gratification; this is an Indication that it comes from Satan. As in the Case of our Mother *Eve*; who, though she was at length overcome by the Temptation, yet at its first Appearance her Heart disliked and rejected it. And it is a comfortable Reflection to remember, that while this Detestation remains, it is a Sign that nothing in it is to be laid to our Charge.

5. When the Temptation is *violent*, it is another Indication of Satan's Agency. We are perhaps hurried on with a Kind of Impetuosity, and urged to commit a Sin in the utmost Haste. The Temptation says, "You must do this;" and the Suggestion will not allow us Time to think, but drives us on, *nolens, volens*, into the Iniquity. And what can we judge from such an Experience as this, but that we are under some evil Influence from the wicked one?

Farther,

Farther, Perhaps the Suggestion pursues us from Day to Day; we want to get rid of it; we strive, we pray against it; but still it follows us, and will not take a Denial; but is forcing, rather than persuading us into the Abomination tempted to: This likewise is another plain Indication of Satan's Agency.

I would finish these Remarks with a particular Thought, that reaches to all the foregoing Heads, and which, from the Nature of the Thing, appears to be an Evidence of Satan's Influence; and that is, the Temptation's being *external*, or from without. And here I must desire every one to look distinctly into his own Experience, to find out the Difference between what proceeds from *within*, and what comes from *without*. You may easily know in what Manner your own Thoughts usually arise; you may, as it were, feel them coming forth from your own Hearts; and so by this inward Feeling they appear to be from within. But at other Times the Thoughts seem to be produced by an Impression upon you; they are darted into your Minds, rather than proceed from them. This I must leave to every one's attentive Observation of himself; hoping, that by a frequent Inquiry you may be able, from your own Experience, to distinguish the one from the other. And if you have clear Reason to think, that the evil Thoughts are injected into, and not produced from your Minds, you may safely ascribe them to the Agency of Satan. For he has not an immediate Access to our Hearts, but can only work upon the Imagination, and so dart, inject, or suggest Thoughts to the Mind.

Having thus endeavoured to give as clear and as scriptural an Account as I can of this intricate Matter, let me conclude with a few Advices and Directions.

1. *Take heed and do not charge all upon Satan.* This is too common a Case, especially among those that have not the Fear of God before their Eyes. When I hear Persons continually casting the Fault of their Sins upon the Devil's Temptations and Suggestions, I cannot but suspect that such are awfully ignorant of themselves, have never yet known the Corruptions of their own Hearts, nor seen the Excellency of Jesus Christ. But if Persons are inclined seriously and conscientiously to take the whole Fault upon themselves, this is an Error on the right Hand: For it is a great Sign of a tender Conscience to take too much to ourselves, rather than too little. And doubtless every one that has truly seen the Plague, Deceitfulness and Corruption of his own Heart, will be rather inclined to suspect himself, than strive to pacify his Conscience by laying the Guilt upon Satan, or any other. But you will perhaps say, "How shall I know when to charge any thing upon myself, and how far am I personally guilty of what I find working in me, or injected into my Mind?" I answer, You need not be much at a Loss upon this Head; for I must tell you in real Faithfulness, that you are to charge every Suggestion upon yourselves, as your own Fault, so far as you yourselves are either active in them, consent to them, or feel any Pleasure in the Reception of them; yea, so far as you do not seriously and heartily oppose them, so far you bring Blame and Guilt upon yourselves. But yet,

2. *Do not charge all upon yourselves.* This Advice I have to recommend unto all those, that are perpetually troubled with, and perplexed by those Workings in their Minds, which are exceeding grievous and offensive to them. Art thou, O poor Soul, troubled with blasphemous Thoughts, or dost thou find thyself hurried

ried on into that which is contrary to the Frame of thy Mind, and the Temper of thy Heart? Remember for thy Comfort that these Things are only to be viewed as *Afflictions*, and that they will not be imputed to thee as *Sins*. Thou art ready to say indeed, "Oh! I am filled
" with so many evil Thoughts, with so many Blasphemies against God, with so much Questioning about
" the Truth, that surely my Heart must be very bad,
" and my Case very desperate; surely never a poor Sinner was ever so vile as I am!" And is this the Language of thy Soul? Remember, this very Complaint is a happy Token that these Things are not to be laid to thy Charge; neither will they be imputed to thee by him who knows the Secrets of all Hearts. The great and gracious God, that sees all the Ways and Workings of the wicked one, and knows the Workings and Strugglings of thy Heart against his violent and abominable Suggestions, will have Compassion upon thee; will consider thy Frame, and resent the Indignities that are offered to thee by Satan, as if done to himself. And thou hast great Reason to bless God under all this spiritual Affliction, if thou art enabled still to withhold the Consent of thy Will, and still to abhor and detest those Suggestions from thy very Heart. Let these Thoughts encourage and excite thee to go on resisting the Devil, being confident in the Faith, and he will flee from thee.

3. When you find, upon Examination, that it is difficult or impossible to decide from whence the Temptation comes, *it is the best Way to take the Fault of it upon yourself*. Sometimes Experiences of this Kind are so intricate, that we cannot come to any Certainty whether Satan or our own Hearts have the chief Hand in the present Evil. Now I apprehend that, in such Cases we need not be too curious to know whether Satan begun

first, or our own Hearts : For whatsoever it be, or from whencesoever it may first come, yet it is our own in the Event, if it suits our natural Inclination, if it falls in with the Temper of our own Minds, and is received with any Delight in our Souls. Besides, it is a general Rule, which we may always take ; namely, That whatsoever is difficult to be known, it is of very little Importance to decide it. And we may be very sure it is so in the present Case, because that which renders it difficult to make the Distinction is the Coincidence of our own Hearts with the Temptation. Perhaps some Persons may be for indulging a Curiosity of Mind in solving of this Question, and so may spend their Time and Thoughts in enquiring which is most guilty Satan or themselves ; whereas their Thoughts and Time would be better employed in humbling themselves for the Share their own Hearts have in the Iniquity, and in setting about to resist the Temptation.

4thly. and lastly. Remember, *that neither Temptation nor Corruption can bar up the Door of Hope*, or be a sufficient Reason for any Soul to sink into Desperation. This I speak for the Encouragement and Direction of those who are perpetually entertaining gloomy Thoughts concerning themselves, because they feel so much Corruption working, or find themselves so much under the Power of Temptation. Many serious Persons are continually poring upon themselves, and complaining under their Burdens to such a Degree, as to prevent them from taking the Comfort, and embracing the Hope, which the Gospel holds forth. Let this therefore be a general Rule with you, That whatsoever Corruptions are seen and lamented, and whatsoever Temptations are felt as a Burden, be they ever so bad, they can be no Reason for Discouragement. Though you may be continually buffeted by
Satan's

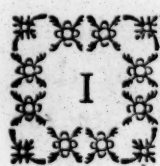
Satan's Temptations, or continually distressed by the Risings of your own Corruptions; yet still, remember, the Hope of the Gospel is gloriously full, and completely free; so *free*, that the Corruptions of your Hearts cannot destroy it, nor the Temptations of Satan deprive you of a Right to lay hold of it. Nay, the more violently thou art tempted, and the more thou seest thyself corrupted, the stronger is the Call upon thee to fly to the *Lord Jesus Christ* for Strength both against Sin and Satan: For the *Lord Jesus Christ* is a ready Succour to all such as are hurried and perplexed either by their internal or external Enemies. Such as these are the very Persons that *Christ* has promised to save: For it is said, Psalm lxxii. 12—14. *He shall spare the Poor and Needy, and shall save the Souls of the Needy. He shall redeem their Soul from Deceit and Violence: And precious shall their Blood be in his Sight.* Believe therefore this gracious Promise, and lay hold of it for thyself; and thou mayst then be sure of this, that the *God of Peace will bruise Satan under thy Feet shortly.* Rom. xvi. 12.



C A S E XIV.



How may a Person know when he has the Assistance of the Spirit of God in Prayer?

T is not one of the least of our Privileges to have the Spirit promised as a * *Spirit of Grace and Supplication*, and to have Encouragement to expect his Assistance in our Approaches to the Throne of Grace. And it is of great Importance for the Christian to know that he has the *Spirit* with him in *Prayer*; as it has a peculiar Tendency to satisfy him that he is a Child of God, gives him Hopes of Acceptance, and is a Means of promoting a steady Dependence upon him, and encouraging his Expectations of all suitable Supplies from him.

Now the Spirit is not always equally present with us in the Duty of Prayer. We often provoke him to leave us in some measure, that he may try and humble us: And then how heavily do we go on! We perform the Outside of the Duty, but we are Strangers too much to the Spirit and Life of it. The Spirit indeed is often present with the Christian, and he perceives it not. That we may therefore be able to distinguish aright here, is our present Enquiry.

Here I shall only mention three Things, from which I apprehend we may conclude whether we have the Spirit or not in Prayer, *viz.* We may know it from the spiritual Light and Discerning he gives us of spiritual Things—From the Manner and Frame, in which he enables

* Zech. xii. 10.

enables us to pray—and from the Ends we have in View in the Duty.

I. *The Spirit, as a Spirit of Prayer, opens to us a View of those great and important Things, which it is necessary we should know, that we may pray aright.* This appears in two Things: In opening our Eyes, and giving us a Sight of our various Wants: and in setting before us the Nature, Variety, and Excellency of those Blessings that are suited to our Circumstances.

I. *The Spirit opens our Eyes, and gives us a Sight and Sense of our various Wants.*—The Spirit in Prayer acts as a *Spirit of Illumination*. He first gives us a View of our State, and then affects our Minds with it. He opens to us our *Hearts* and discovers those Things, that would otherwise have lay concealed. He impresses upon us a Sense, and gives us a View of our *Guilt*, shews us the awful Demerit of Sin, and the numberless Instances in which we have been chargeable with it: So that, to use the Apostle's Language *, *Sin revives, and we die*; we see ourselves lost and undone without an Interest in pardoning Mercy. The Spirit brings to our View those secret Evils of *Pride, Lust, vain Thoughts, Wanderings in Duty*, and other Heart Sins, which escape the Notice of the unrenewed Sinner. He shows us how *filthy* our Natures are, and what need we stand in of sanctifying Grace. He lets us see the *Imperfections* of our best Duties, and therefore how insufficient to justify us before God. He discovers to us the *Power* Sin has within us, and our Weakness and Inability to withstand its Opposition, and keep on in our Christian Course. He shews us our *Nakedness* and Poverty, our *Weakness* and Folly, our *Blindness* and Stupidity; and all to sink us in our own Esteem, and to stir us up to seek to him in whom all

our

* Rom. vii. 9.

our Help is found. This therefore is a *necessary* Part of the Spirit's Work. But,

2. *The Spirit sets before us the Nature, Variety, and Excellency of those Blessings which are represented in the Gospel.* Does he shew us our Guilt? He shews us *Pardon* too; by whom it is purchased; and how it is to be had, *viz.* in an Application by Faith to *Jesus Christ*. Does he set before us the Sins of our Services, the Depravity of our Natures, our Weakness, Folly and Emptiness? He at the same Time directs us to an infinitely pure and everlasting *Righteousness* to justify us, *Grace* purchased and prepared to sanctify us, *Strength* to preserve us, *Treasures* of Wisdom and Knowledge, and an *inexhaustible Fullness* in our exalted Redeemer to supply every Want. He opens to us the *Promises* of the Gospel, and shews us their Fullness and Glory. And finally, he gives us a View of that *great Salvation* exhibited in the Gospel, the Blessings of which it consists, their Richness, Suitableness and Excellency; and all to direct our Petitions, and add Fervency to our Desires. Through Ignorance, we are often ready to ask amiss; to be importunate for a temporal Blessing, when we should rather have had our Eyes fixed upon those of a spiritual Nature. It was Ignorance that made the Mother of Zebedee's Children ask, *that her Sons might sit, the one on the right Hand, and the other on the left Hand of Christ in his Kingdom*, Mat. xx. 21. This Part of the Spirit's Work therefore is of *great Importance*; and if, when drawing near to God, we have had a View of our Guilt, Vileness, Weakness, &c. and of the Glories of the Gospel, the Blessings of the everlasting Covenant, and the Fullness that is in Christ, we have Reason to conclude *that the Spirit was with us*.

II. We may know in some measure whether we have the Assistance of the Spirit or not, *from the Frame of Soul in which we pray.*—As,

1. If we have the Spirit with us, *we are in the most humble Frame.* Thus, when * *Abraham* was pleading for *Sodom*, with what *Humility* did he do it; what *Awe* and *Reverence* filled his Soul at a View of the infinite Majesty of that God he was speaking to; and how did he *admire* his amazing Condescension in admitting such a weak, imperfect Creature to stand before him! A proud Spirit is an *Abomination* to the Lord, and contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel. When a Christian comes under the Influences of the Spirit to the Throne of Grace, what a *Sense* has he of his Vileness, his Ingratitude, his Unworthiness of every Mercy! How *ready* to renounce all his own Righteousnesses, and reckon them but as filthy Rags! How willing to receive Salvation as a free Gift, and to admire infinite rich Grace in the Bestowment of it! *This, this* is the Frame that *shews* the Christian, and runs through all his Duties, when the Spirit is with him.—See him: there he is, falling down before God. View his humble Posture, an Emblem of the deeper Humility of his Soul. Hear his Confessions, how he laments his numerous Backslidings, chides his slothful Soul, and dares not even *lift up* his Eyes to Heaven: But when he does, how sweetly does he admire divine Grace to such a Wretch! Oh, he sinks into nothing!—What is his Errand? See, how *humbly* he delivers it! He dare not *dictate* to God. Has he an Affliction in Prospect, or is he actually under the Exercise of one? Though he would rejoice to have the one averted, and the other removed, yet he desires to be *all Submission*; and therefore you hear him saying, “Father, if
“ it may be for *thy Glory*, let not such an Affliction
“ come

* Gen. xviii. 23—32.

“ come upon me, or take away this Thorn in the
 “ Flesh: Yet shall I presume to *direct thee*? No, like
 “ my dearest Lord, I would say, *Not my Will, but thine*
 “ *be done*, Matth. xxvi. 39.” Thus *Eli* received the
 News from *Samuel* concerning his Children, 1 Sam. iii.
 18. And thus *David* committed himself and his Affairs
 into the Hands of God, when *Absalom* in a most unnat-
 ural Manner rose up against him, and obliged him to
 go out of *Jerusalem*, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.—When a Soul
 comes in *this humble Frame* to the Throne of Grace, it
 is a Sign that he has *the Spirit of God with him*.—

2. We may conclude that the Spirit of God is with
 us, *when we are enabled to pray with continued Earnestness*
and Importunity. — The Spirit is said to *make Intercession*
for us with Groanings which cannot be uttered, Rom. viii.
 26. intimating, that our Desires are sometimes so strong,
 that we cannot find suitable Words to express them by,
 and therefore utter them by *Groanings* and *broken Sighs*.
 Have you not found such Seasons, when your Souls
 were filled with such Breathings after God, that you
 could not express them? This seemed to be the Pub-
 lican's Case. He had such a Sense of his filthy, mise-
 rable Condition, and such Desires after Salvation, that
 he could not properly utter them. He opens his Heart
 first by outward Signs, and then in those short but com-
 prehensive Words, *Lord, be merciful to me a Sinner*,
 Luke xviii. 13. The Christian oftentimes, under tem-
 poral or spiritual Difficulties, comes and pours out his
 Heart with a peculiar Degree of Earnestness as the
 Disciples did, when they came and awoke their Master,
 saying, *Lord, save us; we perish*, Matth. viii. 25. The
 Words point out a peculiar *Eagerness* and *Vehemency*, a
 Mind in Distress, having more than the Tongue can
 well utter. — When we are slothful and formal in this
 Duty

Duty of Prayer; when we are, as it were, *unconcerned* about what Frame we are in, or what we pray for; when we come only out of *Custom*, and *half asleep* present ourselves before God, and our Words *die* upon our Lips, it is a Sign that we know nothing of the Spirit's Assistance in that Duty. *Saul* did not pray *thus*, when he was converted. He might indeed whilst he was a *Pharisee*: But had you seen him upon his Knees, after Christ called to him from Heaven, you would have heard him *wrestling* with holy Importunity, under a *deep Sense* of his numerous Sins, and of the Importance of spiritual Blessings. The Spirit sweetly filled his Mouth with Arguments, and helped him to expostulate with God. Thus *Jacob* wrestled with the Lord: *He would not let him go, unless he blessed him*, Gen. xxxii. 24—26. How happy when the Christian is enabled to do so too! This shews that he has the Spirit of God with him, opening his Mouth, quickening his Desires, melting his Soul, enabling him even to turn *Discouragements* into Arguments, and to hold on pleading as the *Woman of Canaan* did. Who but the Spirit helps the Christian to take a *Promise*, and come and plead it with God? —
“ Lord, here is thy Word; the Word by which thou
“ hast caused me to hope. I would plead it with thee.
“ Lord, is it not thine own Promise, and wilt thou not
“ fulfil it? Oh, permit me to expostulate with thee. I
“ cannot be silent, but must speak. I am miserable,
“ and shall be so for ever, unless thou wilt look upon
“ me. Lord, stretch forth thine Hand, and for thy
“ great Name's sake do thou pardon me, sanctify, and
“ save me.” Such *Wrestlings* shew that we are in *good earnest*, and that *we have the Spirit of God with us*.

3. We have the Spirit with us, *when we are enabled to pray in the Name of Christ*. Thus our Lord tells us,

B

that

that there is *no coming unto the Father but in and through him*; and, that *whatsoever we shall ask in his Name, that he will do*, John xiv. 6, 13. It is not intimated by this, that it is enough to *mention* the Name of Christ, but that in our Addresses to God we *look to*, and *depend upon* Christ the Mediator for Acceptance. That we come, *renouncing* all Merit of our own, taking the *Sacrifice* of Jesus into the Arms of our Faith, presenting it before God as a *sufficient Atonement* for our Sins, and *pleading* its infinite Merit for our Pardon, and for the Bestowment of every Blessing we want. Hear the Language of the Soul, when drawing near to God, and see the Ground of his Dependence:—“ Lord, I would venture
 “ near thy Throne in the Name of my Mediator. ’Tis
 “ in *him alone* that it is become a Throne of Grace, and
 “ to *him* would I ascribe *all* the Glory. Lord, behold,
 “ see what he has done and suffered. View the Sacri-
 “ fice thou hast appointed, thou hast accepted, and re-
 “ ceive a poor unworthy Creature. I have nothing to
 “ recommend myself to thee, but, adored be thine infi-
 “ nite Grace, my Redeemer has. On his Mediation
 “ I would rest my Soul, and come with Boldness, and,
 “ though guilty, expect Pardon, and a whole Salvation.”
 To exercise this Faith in Christ; to sink ourselves and our Services, and exalt him, is more than a Creature can do. Whenever therefore we are enabled to lie at the Feet of Christ, and to come thus in his Name, *we have the Spirit of God with us*, whose peculiar Business it is to render the Mediator glorious in the Eyes of a poor guilty Creature.

4. We may conclude that the Spirit is with us, *when we find a sweet Acquiescence in, and Love to God in Prayer*: When we are enabled to view the Emptiness of all earthly Enjoyments, and to rest in God as a sufficient Portion:

Portion : When we find an entire Acquiescence in him, and are helped to draw near, crying, Abba, Father : When we come in a Child-like Frame, valuing the Favour of our heavenly Father before all inferior Things, finding a sweet Subjection and Obedience of Soul, and are satisfied with that Communion we have with him. For Instance ; that Christian has the Presence of the Spirit, who is enabled to draw near to God in some such Manner as this : — “ Lord, *whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth I desire besides thee.* “ Say but to my Soul that thou art my Salvation, and “ *I shall rejoice more, than if my Corn, and Wine, and Oil increased.* I am satisfied, Lord, I am satisfied. “ It is enough that thou art mine. Thou art Portion “ enough. Oh, the everlasting Love of thee, O Fa- “ *ther!* What shall I not render to thee for thinking of “ a Creature so unworthy? — Oh thine infinite Love, “ O mighty God, in coming to rescue me from Dark- “ nefs and Ruin ! How *amiable* is thy Person, and how “ *easy* thy Yoke ! Oh, my Soul would love thee, and “ serve thee with greater Diligence and Affection than “ I have hitherto done. I would esteem *thy Love better* “ *than Wine.* Oh, my Prophet, my Priest, my King, “ thou shalt be *all* to me, and I will give up *my all* to “ thee.” — This shews that *we have the Assistance of the Spirit*, else we could not so fully give up ourselves to God, and so sweetly acquiesce in him as our Portion.

III. We may conclude that we have the Spirit assisting us in Prayer, *from the Ends we have in View.* — If we pray only to *satisfy* Conscience, and lull that asleep ; if to make *Atonement* for some Sins we have been guilty of ; to *establish* a Righteousness of our own to appear in before God ; or, if we retire only to *please* those we stand related to, or to bring about some *selfish End*, we may

at once conclude, that we have *not the Spirit with us*. But if we come to the Throne of Grace with a View to the *Glory of God*, and the *everlasting Advantage* of ours, and of others Souls; if this is our *chief End*, this the *Mark* we aim at in Prayer; if therefore our greatest Concern is, that we may be delivered from the *Power* of Sin, that our *Corruptions* may be subdued, our *polluted Natures* sanctified, our Tempers, Thoughts and Affections made more spiritual and holy, and our whole Souls brought into a growing Conformity to God; if we come for *Wisdom* to guide and direct us, for *Strength* to keep us in an Hour of Temptation, for *Righteousness* to cloath us, and for *greater Measures of Grace* to enable us to bring forth the Fruits of Righteousness to the Glory of God; if, finally, they are *spiritual Blessings* we have our Eyes chiefly fixed upon, and these are the Springs and Motives from whence we consequently act, we may then comfortably conclude, *that we have the Spirit of God with us in Prayer*.—Let us now bring the Case more home to ourselves by a particular Application. And,

1. *Let us all be concerned to examine ourselves as to this important Matter*. — Let me inquire, O my Soul, how it is with me, when I come to God by Prayer. Have I a Sense of my numerous Wants? Do I see my *Nakedness* and *Poverty*? Do I appear *vile* in my own Eyes? Am I enabled to *mourn* over Sin, to *humble* myself before God, and *admire* the Riches of his Grace in taking Notice of a Creature so unworthy? Do I find a *Submission* of Soul to God in Prayer, a Willingness to be disposed of by him at his Pleasure? Have I a Sense of the *Excellency* and *Importance* of spiritual Blessings, and am I enabled to plead with God for them, as a Person in *good earnest*? Do I come in the *Name of Jesus*, looking to him alone for Acceptance, and building all my Hopes of

of Salvation upon him? Do I at any Time find a *sweet Acquiescence* in God, esteeming myself happy, if I have but any Communion with him, and can but cry, *Abba, Father*; yea, inconceivably more happy, than if I had all the World? Have I any Reason to conclude, that I have *his Glory* in View? Is my Errand to the Throne of Grace to *lament* over my Sins, to *beg* for renewing and sanctifying Grace, that I may be more *like God*, and be prepared to honour him more in every Circumstance in Life? — These are Questions of great Importance, and should be attended to by us all, with the greatest Faithfulness and Impartiality.

2. *We may improve this Subject by way of Consolation.* If, upon Examination, you have Reason to believe that you have found the Spirit with you, thus directing and assisting your Petitions, you may from thence conclude, *that you are the Children of God.* For the Spirit, as a Spirit of Prayer, is a *special Blessing* of the New Covenant, and is not given to those who are Strangers to the divine Life. You may farther conclude, *that your Prayers shall be answered in God's own Time, and in his own Way*; and therefore be waiting with Expectation of it, and that God will take you under his peculiar Care, and fulfil all his Promises in the Bestowment of every needed Blessing.—Hence conclude farther for your Comfort, that if the Spirit is with you as a Spirit of Prayer, *he will be with you too as a Spirit of Sanctification*, as a Spirit of *Illumination* to enlighten you more and more in the great Mysteries of Grace; — as a *Guide* to direct your Ways, till he brings you to his heavenly Kingdom; —and, when he sees fit, as a *Spirit of Adoption*, as the *great Comforter* to support and cheer your Souls under every Difficulty.

3. Hence learn *the Difference between the Intercession of Christ, and that of the Spirit.* The one prays for us;

the other prays *in* us, or helps us to pray. Christ pleads in *Heaven*; the Spirit helps his People here on *Earth*, opens their Eyes, warms their Hearts, quickens their Desires, and enables them to turn them into Petitions. Christ's Intercession and the Spirit's too are of great Importance; and, blessed be God, his People enjoy them both. Whilst Christ is interceding for them above, the Spirit is helping them to plead with God for themselves here. Oh, Glory be to God, who has made such Provision for us, and given us such Encouragement to pray and wait for his Salvation!

4. Hence *we have Reason to be humbled, that we have paid so little Regard to the Spirit in Prayer.* How many have been rather concerned to pray with Fluency and Elegancy of Expression, than to find the Spirit with them, kindling a Fire of divine Love in their Souls, and enabling them to pour out their Hearts before the Lord? Let us each be humbled, that we have so much *neglected* the Spirit in this important Character; take care that we grieve him not, and so provoke him to withdraw from us. And, finally, May none of us dare to live *without Prayer*, and yet always look upon those Prayers as *useless* and *unprofitable*, which are only put up to satisfy Conscience, or out of mere Custom, and be concerned that we not only are favoured with the *Gift*, but experience the *Grace* and *Spirit* of Prayer. To this may we all say *Amen.*

C A S E XV.

How may we keep from spiritual Pride, after special Enlargements in Duty?

I am directed to take this Case under Consideration, in Consequence of the following short, but pithy and experimental Epistle.

S I R,

“ I Am one who have professed to have received
 “ Christ Jesus the Lord : O that I could say, I
 “ walked answerable to so great and glorious a Privi-
 “ lege ! But, alas, I find a sad Carnality and Coldness
 “ in Duty, and see that my very best Performances are
 “ utterly insufficient to recommend me to a holy God ;
 “ nay, that there is enough in each of them to merit
 “ everlasting Punishment. Yet, when I have some
 “ happy Enlargement in Duty, especially that of Pray-
 “ er, this corrupt Heart of mine is ready to say, *Well*
 “ *done, this is something like praying ; now God will hear*
 “ *my Petitions, and accept my Person.* Thus is my
 “ proud Heart puffed up ! This Rust of Pride soon eats
 “ out all the Spirituality of my Frame. I should be
 “ glad, Sir, to have the following Query answered at
 “ the Lecture, *viz. How may a Person keep from spi-*
 “ *ritual Pride, after unusual Enlargement in Duty.*”

ETHINKS, upon laying this Letter before you, I hear many of the Hearts of God's dear Children echoing to these Complaints, and longing to have such an important Query resolved.

It is a common, but a very sad Complaint of the Believer, that he finds a great deal of Coldness and Indifferency in spiritual Duties. He feels his Soul cleaving to the Dust, his Affections stupified, his Heart hardened, his Conscience benumbed, and all the Powers of his Soul sadly unactive; so that there seems to be no Grace in Exercise, and the Duties performed appear to be no better than dead Works. In the above Epistle we find a very humble and suitable Acknowledgment, that the best of our Performances are utterly insufficient to recommend us to God, and that there is Sin enough in them to deserve eternal Punishment. And one would think, that a Person who really sees and feels these Things in himself, could not but be humbled before God at all Times, and upon every Occasion, being sensible of the Imperfections of his best Duties, and the Sin that cleaves to them. For certainly there is much Unbelief mixed with our Faith, much Diffidence with our Hope, much Coldness with our Love, and much Corruption with our Desires. But yet we find in the above Epistle, that all this Acknowledgment, Sense and Experience will not root up, nor keep down this Weed of Pride in our Hearts. It will and does remain and appear upon various Occasions, and at no Seasons more commonly than after spiritual Enlargement in Duty. The Manner of its working is here set forth very exactly and feelingly: For, if God at any Time gives us the Tokens of his Love, draws forth our Desires in Prayer, enables us to wrestle and plead with him, and to lay

hold

hold of his Promises, we find that Pride is such a Weed, that it will grow upon the very best of our Duties, and the most comfortable of our Enjoyments. Upon this the Heart cries out, as *Leah* did, "Surely my Husband will love me, because I am fruitful: I shall be amiable in the Sight of my Lord, because of the Excellency of these Duties, and the Spirituality of these my Affections." And what follows upon all this? Why, the Consequence is very sad and afflictive: These Motions of Pride spoil the Duty, make it unacceptable and abominable to God, and prevent all the happy Effects which we hoped would result from thence. For in this Way we hug our Comforts to Death: Pride, like a Cancer, preys upon the very Vitals of the new Creature, perverts the Affections of the Soul, and promotes a carnal Security; and thus that which should have been for our Welfare becomes a Snare to our Souls. And I will venture to affirm, that whosoever seriously attends to his own Heart, will find much of this in him, which may well fill him with Shame, and make him humble for the Pride of his Heart; knowing that hereby he has provoked God, and polluted his own Soul. Upon this, Comfort is withdrawn, God is displeased, he hides his Face, and the Believer is troubled. But after all the Disadvantages we feel from the Workings of spiritual Pride, we find this cursed Principle will rise and work. We know not how to root it out, or keep it under; and would be glad to know what Methods to take, to be able to walk with true Humility before God. I confess it is very difficult to give any effectual Directions in such a Case as this; because Pride is so interwoven in our very Natures, and works in such a secret and undermining Way. However, I would mention a few Particulars, which, by the Blessing of God, may be happily successful for the removing this grievous Complaint.

I. Endeav-

1. Endeavour to *detect* and *pursue* the Workings of Pride in its various Appearances. Pride in the Believer's Heart is like a Midnight Thief, which cares not to be seen and observed; and nothing tends more to suppress it, than to be looking upon it; for immediately upon its being discerned, it does, as it were, hide its Head for Shame. This Rule our Friend in his Letter seems to have been enabled, in some Measure, to follow; otherwise he could never have drawn out this Complaint from his own Experience so feelingly and exactly. But it is not sufficient merely to observe it in this particular Appearance of it; we ought to pursue it in its other Forms; for it is very likely, that the Reason why this cursed Principle rises and prevails at present, is, because it has got some Strength in other Respects, which perhaps has not as yet been discovered. Let me therefore ask you, my dear Friend, whether you, who are so much puffed up upon spiritual Enlargements, do not feel yourself as much discouraged and disheartened under spiritual Contractions? Perhaps you have been used to think, that these Discouragements have been the Effect of true Conviction and Humiliation: You think that, when you have not much Enlargement in Duty, you have Reason to be discouraged, and to be afraid of embracing the free Hope of the Gospel. Let me therefore intreat you to look a little closer into this Matter; for I am very suspicious, that Pride gains and maintains its Power in this Way; because it is in these Circumstances more insensible and undiscerned. You think it reasonable to be sunk in yourself; and imagine that you must not dare to lay hold of free Grace, while under spiritual Complaints. Now what is this, but a certain Kind of secret Pride? It is a saying in your Heart, that if you had more Holiness, and less Sin, then you could be more encouraged; which

which is as much as to say, that our Encouragement to hope before God is grounded upon the Smallness of our Sins, or the Purity of our Hearts: As if the Greatness of our Sins and Corruptions took away our Right to the free Promise of the Gospel. Now such a Frame of Mind as this, if rightly explained, will be found to be nothing less than the forcing a Condition upon a free Promise. You ought indeed to be humbled and ashamed under corrupt and unbelieving Experiences; but if hereby your Heart is deterred from laying hold of the free Promise, you may take it for granted, that here is Pride at the Bottom. Perhaps it is in this unsuspected Way, the accursed Principle maintains its Strength in your Soul. For it is no wonder, if the same Principle, which makes you discouraged, because of your Sins and Corruptions; should fill you with high Thoughts of yourself, when you find any special Enlargement. And as we should endeavour thus to *detect*, so we should likewise attempt to *pursue* it in its Workings. Are we at first discouraged, as if Grace was not entirely free; and do we then begin to see the Evil of this unbelieving Frame, and to fly absolutely to Christ? We should, in the next place, see whether this same Principle does not make us proud of our very Faith and Humility. When, by the Exercise of Faith, we have received fresh Grace and Comfort, now let us see farther, whether this same Principle does not make us proud of the Grace received. Yea farther, if we set about to humble ourselves for the Pride of our Hearts, let us watch ourselves narrowly, lest we be made proud of our very Humility. Upon the whole, we should thus pursue it from Step to Step, as it rises; and this, by a divine Blessing, will have an admirable Tendency to subdue its Power, and supplant its Workings.

2. *Observe how irrational, abominable and detrimental spiritual Pride is.* You know that, in temporal Cases, it is not enough to see an Enemy; but to see and know him as such, in order to be the more watchful against him, and the more steady in opposing of him. Thus with regard to this dangerous Foe; though it be so suited to our Natures, that we are ready sometimes to take it for a Friend, yet it will be found, upon a close Examination, to be the most detestable and destructive Enemy. For, what can be more *irrational*, than for a poor, necessitous, filthy, guilty Creature to be elated in the Presence of a holy and just God? What can be more *provoking* to God, than for our Hearts to take the Crown from his Head, and put it upon our own? And what can be more *detrimental* to the Life of Religion in our Souls, than Self-sufficiency? Pride strikes at the very Root of all our Comforts and Graces, and Humility is a necessary Ingredient in all spiritual Experience. For if our Faith be true, it is an humble Faith; if our Hope be genuine, it is an humble Hope; if our Love be sincere, it is an humble Love. The same must be said concerning all the other Graces of the new Creature. Pride contradicts the first Principles of the Oracles of God; for, when our Minds suggest, that God will accept our Persons, and receive us into Favour, because of our Enlargement in Duty, our Hearts then speak directly contrary to the fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel. And still, to set forth more of the exceeding Sefulness of this Sin, let us consider how peculiarly *ungrateful* it must be for us to dishonour God by those very Favours and Comforts which he freely indulges us with. Let such Thoughts as these frequently recur to our Minds, that we may maintain a perpetual Hatred of this Abomination;

tion; and this may be a happy Means of weakening its Influence in us.

3. *Fight against* it by the Word of God and Prayer. You know, in temporal Cases, it is not enough to see and hate an Enemy; but we are likewise to oppose him, and militate against him. If therefore you would know how to fight against this spiritual Adversary, I would direct you to take the Sword of the Spirit into your Hands, and with it strike at this Sin. In order to familiarize the Manner in which you are to do this, let me put it in the following Light: Does thy Heart say, "O this is something like praying?" Then produce some such Word as that in Answer to the Suggestion, *That we know not what to pray for as we ought.* Does thy Mind say, "Surely God will accept my Person, because of my good Deeds?" Reply to this Suggestion in the Language of Scripture, *Not by Works, lest any Man should boast.* Does the Pride of thy Heart say, "Surely I am amiable in God's Sight, because of what I am and have done?" Give an Answer in some such Words as these; *What hast thou which thou hast not received? &c.* This is the Way to play the Artillery of Revelation against the Workings of Corruption. And while you are attempting thus to resist the Devil and your own Corruptions, look up to God by Prayer; imploring that he would recollect to your Mind by his Spirit such Portions of his Word, as may be a full Answer to the Language of your Pride; and that he would likewise impress those Sentiments upon your Minds and Hearts, and give them such a Force and Energy, as will effectually humble your Souls, and shame your Pride.

4. *Endeavour to turn this Experience into another Channel.* You know, that when a River swells, and begins to overflow its Banks, the Way to prevent it is

to

to open the Sluices, and let the Water run out; whereby it is kept from running over those Places, where it would be detrimental rather than serviceable. Men have this Wisdom in natural Things; and oh that Christians had but such Skill in spiritual Things! But you will perhaps say, How shall I turn this sad Experience into another Channel? I answer, Art thou enlarged in thy Soul, comfortable in thy Frame, lively and spiritual in thy Duties? Instead of taking Occasion from hence to be lifted up, rather make it an Occasion of *Thankfulness* and *Encouragement*. Endeavour therefore to reason after this Manner: "Am I thus
"favoured with special and delightful Experiences? O
"let me remember, this is not of my own Production:
"And what a Call is this upon me to be thankful to
"God for his interposing Grace!" This surely will be found a proper Method to remove the present Complaint; because true Thankfulness and spiritual Pride are direct Opposites to each other. For the more thankful we can be to God for what he works in us, and bestows upon us, the less we shall be subject to spiritual Pride. Again, let these Experiences be improved for farther *Encouragement*. For, if Pride takes Advantage from a spiritual Frame to puff us up, it will certainly sink and discourage our Hearts, when that happy Frame is withdrawn. But if we are enabled to take Encouragement from the Comforts and Quicknings we feel, to hope that the same free Grace and almighty Power will appear in our Favour in future Times; this will be making the present Experience preparatory for that Season, when we may be called upon to live by Faith, without Sight or Sense. Let us say in our Souls,
"If the Lord thus comforts and enlarges me by his
"free and powerful Grace at present, then what
"Reason

“ Reason have I to hope, if ever I fall into spiritual
“ Distress or into a carnal Frame again, that the Lord
“ will appear and work Deliverance for me in the same
“ free, gracious and powerful Manner, that he has now
“ done ?” By this Means, those spiritual Frames, which
have been the Food of our *Pride*, will become the Food
of our *Faith* and *Love*.

Lastly. *Take Advantage*, from the Workings of
Pride to excite and stir up spiritual Graces. As, by
the Complaints of the Letter, we see that corrupt Na-
ture knows how to bring Evil out of Good ; so we may
be sure that the Work of Grace can bring great Good
out of this melancholy Evil. For as there is nothing too
good in this Life to be misimproved by Pride and Self ; so
there is nothing too bad in Christian Experience to be
improved for spiritual Advantage. There is such a Thing
as improving upon a barren Ordinance, and upon a carnal,
proud and unbelieving Frame. The proper Way of doing
this is as follows : Dost thou find thyself swelled and
elated with Pride ? Take Occasion from hence to know
more of the Corruptions of thine own Heart, to see
more of the Sinfulness of Sin, and to be more apprized of
thine own Insufficiency for every Thing that is spiritually
good. This sad Experience is certainly a fresh Evidence
and Proof of these Soul-humbling Truths : And if
hereby thou art more feelingly convinced that without
Christ thou canst do nothing ; if thou art here-
by more fully apprized of the Deceitfulness and Base-
ness of thine own Heart ; if thou art hereby made more
clearly to see thine own Impurity ; these Sightings and
Convictions may be improved as a happy Means of
humbling and quickening thy Soul to lay thee low at
the Foot-stool of free Grace, and to cast thyself upon
the Mercy of God in Christ. To do thus, is to fight
Satan with his own Weapons ; to overcome Corruption
by

by its own Appearances ; and at once to defeat all the Ends of the Devil and Corruption in the Affair. It is very plain, that the Design of Satan, and the Tendency of these Corruptions, are to eat out the Life and Power of Godliness : Whereas, if by these Means thou learnest more of thyself, and seeest more Need of quickening, strengthening and purifying Grace ; then these Complaints will be so far from eating out the Vitals of Religion, that they will be a blessed Means, in the Hands of the Spirit, of promoting true Humility and Purity of Heart. And what though thou shouldst be incapable, after all, to keep Pride from working ? yet in this Way thou wilt find no real Detriment arising from it, but rather the Work of Humiliation will be promoted and confirmed by the very Sight and Sense thou hast of the corrupt Motions of Self and Pride.

Let me conclude the whole with two or three brief Reflections :

1. *How imperfect are the Graces and Experiences of the Children of God in the present State !* As a Believer, in his worst Condition, is very uncomfortable and distressed, or very carnal and worldly ; so, in his best Estate here, he is in great Danger of being lifted up with Pride and Self-conceit. The greatest Enjoyments and the highest Attainments cannot secure him from falling by it. So that the strongest as well as the weakest Believer has need to watch and pray, lest he enter into Temptation.

2. *How desirable must Heaven be !* Since there we shall be filled with Joy unspeakable, and be possessed of perfect Holiness, without the least Hazard of losing our Purity or Delight. There will be the highest Enjoyment, joined with the deepest Humility ; and the most perfect Holiness, without the least Tincture of Pride.

Pride. The perpetual Enjoyment of God's Love will make us compleatly happy; and the constant Sight of God's Glory will keep us entirely humble. Blessed State indeed!

3. *How blind are Sinners with Respect to their own Hearts!* We very seldom hear them complaining of Pride, when indeed they are full of it. They have frequently an high Opinion of their own Virtues, Worth and Excellency, and think themselves justified herein: Whereas, if they did but see themselves in the Glass of the Law, and could compare themselves with the unspotted Purity of God, they would blush, and be confounded, and abhor themselves as unspeakably vile and abominable. We may take it for granted, that all those who have not seen and lamented their own Pride, are as yet Strangers, both to God and themselves, both to the Law and the Gospel: And if ever they are brought to Christ, they will be made to see and be humbled for the Pride and Stoutness of their own Hearts.

C

CASE



C A S E XVI.

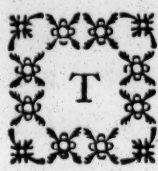


Whether it is necessary to evidence a Person's Conversion, that he see and acknowledge himself the chief of Sinners, though he has not been guilty of outward Abominations? Or, what that Sense of Sin is, which is an Evidence of Conversion, and is therefore accompanied with Salvation?

The following Epistle shews the Propriety of these Questions :

“**H**AVING had the Happiness of a religious
 “ Education, and the Privilege of sitting under
 “ the Sound of the Gospel, I trust I have, by the re-
 “ straining Grace of God, been kept from many ex-
 “ ternal Vices, which Youth too often run into. I
 “ have, by attending on the Means of Grace, been led
 “ to see myself a Sinner, and in some Degree to feel
 “ myself one: For I have daily Cause to lament an hard
 “ Heart, and a corrupt Nature; and my daily Prayer,
 “ to God is, that he would search me, and shew me
 “ the Evil of my Heart, and lead me into the Way
 “ everlasting, and not suffer me to rest short of an In-
 “ terest in Christ. Now, as I have not been guilty of
 “ outward Abominations, I cannot say with the Apostle
 “ Paul, that *I am the chief of Sinners*, and so am afraid
 “ that I know *nothing* of renewing Grace, and therefore
 “ should be glad that you would take into Considera-
 “ tion the above Questions.”

THIS


 HIS Case seems to be founded upon what the Apostle *Paul* says, 1 *Tim.* i. 15. who, after he had taken a View of the Blasphemies he had been guilty of, and the Injury he had done to the Cause and Followers of Christ, stiled himself the *chief of Sinners*. But he did not intimate by this, that *all* who should for the future be saved should be Persons of *his Character*. No; he mentioned his being a *Blasphemer, Persecutor, and injurious*, that he might set forth the *Riches* of divine Grace in the Salvation of a Person *so unworthy*, and that it might be an *Encouragement* to those, who in future Ages should be distressed on Account of the *Greatness* of their Sins, when they see, that the *chief of Sinners* has been already pardoned and saved. The Person who wrote this Epistle has not been guilty of any notorious Sins, and is therefore afraid he does not see *enough* of Sin; that he has not *such a Sense* of his own Vileness, as he *ought* to have; that his Impressions are not *deep enough*; that he must have *such a View* of the Wickedness of his Heart, as readily to *rank himself* amongst the *chief of Sinners*, though his Conversation and Behaviour have been regular and sober, else he can give no *true Evidence* of his Conversion.

In answering this Case, I would throw my Thoughts into the following Method: And may God make what may be said effectual both for Conviction and Establishment!

I. *There is a great Difference in Sins, as to their Heinousness.* Every Sin has an infinite Evil in it, as being the Violation of the Law of an infinite Being. *The Wages of all Sin therefore is Death.* Yet there are many Circumstances that render some Sins *more heinous* than others.

We read of *scarlet Sins*, and those that have *crimson Stains* in them. *Is. i. 18.* Sins against Light and Knowledge, under strong Convictions, and great Advantages, are attended with *peculiar Aggravations*. The Sins which Paul mentions were great Sins, *viz.* Blasphemy, Persecution, &c. because he had the Old Testament to converse with, and had many Opportunities of examining it, whether *Jesus* was the *Christ* or not; but he was obstinately fixed against the Cause of the Redeemer, and took no Methods to soften his Prejudices, but rather to increase them. Sins committed by the *same Person* may be more or less heinous, according to the *particular Circumstances* attending them. But,

II. *God pardons and saves all Sorts of Sinners.* Among the Redeemed of the Lord are all Ranks and Degrees of Sinners. Many, who have had the Privilege of a religious Education, as this young Person, are *singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb*. There are some who were called in their early Days, and others, who were not brought in till old Age had enfeebled their natural Frame. There are those who were Sinners of the *first Rank*, now triumphing in the Mansions above, and arrayed with all the Garments of Salvation. There were all Sorts among the *Corinthian Converts*, *1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.* God does not confine Salvation to a *particular Sort*. He saves Sinners to magnify his *free, rich and sovereign Grace*; and therefore the Heinousness of our Sins is no Objection.

III. *All that are saved have not the same deep Sense of Sin.* Some see the *exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, feel the greatest legal Terrors, and smite upon their Breasts with the *utmost Self-abhorrence*, crying, *Lord, be merciful to us Sinners.* When *Saul's Eyes* were open, and *Sin revived*; when he came to take a View of his *Blasphemies*, his *Persecutions*, &c. he was amazed. When he came

to look *within*, and to see such a *Sink* of-Sin, how he mourned, loathed himself, and esteemed himself the *chief of Sinners*, notwithstanding all the Righteousness he boasted in before ! This Sense of Sin seemed *necessary* in him, to keep him *humble*, to fill him with *Admiration* of the Grace of God in putting him into the *Ministry*, and so to be a *constant Spur* to all Diligence in the Service of *that Jesus*, who had laid him under such peculiar Obligations. But *all* have not this Sense of Sin, neither are brought the *same Way* to Christ. Some are brought *gently*, without any legal Terrors. They are *drawn* with the Cords of Love. Their hard Hearts are *melted down* with a View of the Riches of divine Grace; and the Spirit does not make such a Discovery to them of Sin *all at once* : It is rather a *gradual Work*, and therefore a Work of Time. They have no outward Abominations, as *Saul* had to loath himself for, and have not the same deep Sense of Sin. God acts herein, so as is most for his own Glory, or according to the different Tempers of his People; and therefore he takes various Methods both to bring them first in, and to train them up for Heaven.

IV. *We must not judge of a true, saving Sense of Sin from the Measures or Degrees of it, but from the Manner of its Operation, and its Fruits and Effects.* I would instance in a few Particulars.

I. We may be said to have that Sense of Sin that is accompanied with Salvation, *when we are brought to a Sight of our guilty, naked, helpless and wretched State and Condition.* Do you see yourselves *Transgressors* of the Law, and therefore obnoxious to its Curse? Do you find you are *naked*, that you have no Righteousness to justify you before God, all your Services being filthy and polluted? Do you see yourselves *depraved* in all the Fa-

culties of your Souls? Are you sensible of your *Weakness* and Incapacity, either to make *Atonement* for Sin, or *subdue its Power* and Dominion? Upon the whole, Do you see yourselves *lost* and *miserable*, *blind* and *wretched*, and the *Need* you stand in of a Mediator to bring you into the divine Favour, and to do all for you, and in you? These Heads of Inquiry will discover whether you have a right Sense of Sin or not. These Things must be *felt* and *experienced*, else all our Confessions and Acknowledgments of them will be mere Words of Course, and not the genuine Workings of a Principle of Grace within us. But however a Person may be afraid that he sees not himself vile enough; if he has been led to discern his real State by Nature, and is made sensible of his spiritual Wants, it is a comfortable Sign that he has a suitable Sense of Sin.

2. Where there is a true Sense of Sin, *there is a Hatred of it, and a Self-abhorrence for it.* There may be an awful Fear of Hell, but no Alteration in a Person's Disposition and Affections. The Sinner still loves Sin, and would be glad to keep his sensual Enjoyments, could he but escape everlasting Burnings. On the other hand, the Christian *loaths* Sin, and appears *vile* in his own Eyes, because so much Sin cleaves to his Nature. He sees it as opposite to the *holy Law*, and to the infinitely spotless *Nature* of God, as having *defaced* the divine Image in his Soul, as carrying in it the *greatest Ingratitude*, as doing the *greatest Injury*, unfitting us for *Communion* with God, *interrupting* us in Duty, and robbing us of all our *Peace* and *Comfort*: Finally, he sees its *Obliquity* and *Deformity*, and cannot therefore but hate it, and abhor himself on the Account of it. He cannot talk of the Goodness of his Heart, as some vainly do, but appears vile and contemptible in his own Eyes.

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He sees *nothing* in himself to lay a Foundation for boasting, so long as Sin remains in every Faculty, and cleaves to every Duty. It takes down his spiritual Pride, fills him with Humility, and makes him mourn before the Lord. He sinks into nothing, when he considers the Odiousness of Sin, and *wonders* at divine Grace in taking notice of a Wretch so polluted. This Hatred of Sin and Self-abhorrence is found in every renewed Soul, even though he has not been guilty of any outward Immorality, and is a clear Evidence of our having a saving Sense of Sin.

3. *When we desire and are earnest to be delivered from it, we may conclude that we have a true Sense of Sin.* You may not see so much of the Sinfulness of Sin as some do, but it may be notwithstanding burthensome to you. You may be weary of such a Companion, and cannot but desire a Freedom from it. You reckon yourself a *Captive*, a *Slave*, and it is your great Concern in looking up to God to have *Deliverance proclaimed*. This shews that you have experienced the special quickening Influences of the Spirit of God. This was one of the distinguishing Parts of *Paul's* Experience, *Rom. vii. 24.* *O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death? I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord.* All who can adopt this Language, who are longing to be thoroughly purged and cleansed from Sin, and are thankful for any Hopes of Deliverance through the great Mediator, make it appear that Sin is their real Burthen, and that they have such a Sense of Sin, as is an Evidence of true Conversion.

4. This appears, *when we are made willing to look to, and to rest upon Christ for all Righteousness and Salvation.* Those who have no true Sense of Sin will never make

an Application to Christ for Salvation. Whilst *Saul* the Pharisee thought himself righteous, he was an *Enemy* to Jesus Christ; but when *Sin* revived, he *despaired*, and *died*; saw Jesus as his *only Refuge*, and was made *willing* to go to, and to rest upon him for Salvation. His Language is now, *I count all Things but Loss for the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—desiring to be found in him, not having my own Righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the Faith of Christ, the Righteousness which is of God by Faith*, Rom. iii. 7, 8, 9. Where-ever there is a right Sense of Sin, the Soul will be willing to receive Christ; Christ in every Character, as the Gospel represents him.—“Lord, says he, *whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth I desire besides thee. I would give up my all to thee: I would chearfully part with my own Righteousness, leave my darling Lusts, and give up my dearest Dalilabs, and come to thee, naked and guilty, weak, helpless and polluted, that I may be justified, sanctified, and saved by thee.*” — Where-ever a Sense of Sin is attended with these happy Effects, we may conclude that it was *given us by the Spirit of God, and is an Evidence of a saving Change*. There is one Observation more which I would mention.

V. *The more we grow in Grace, the more we shall see of the Sinfulness and Detestableness of Sin*. Our Knowledge is like the *Morning Light*, which shineth more and more, till it comes to perfect Day. You may not see so much of Sin and of yourself, as you will when God comes to lead you into an Acquaintance with your own Heart. You may not have been chargeable with any outward Immoralities; but, as you *grow in Grace*, you will see more of your own Vileness, and see Reason enough

enough to stile yourself the *unworthiest of Creatures*. When you consider your *Nature*, how *depraved*, that if God had left you to yourself, you would have run into the *same Excesses* as others have done: When you view the Sins you have been guilty of as a *Christian*, the Convictions you have *stifled*, your *Murmurings* and *Ingratitude*, the Rebellion of your *Heart*, your numberless *vain Thoughts*, your *Coldness* and *Formality*, your *spiritual Pride* and *Ostentation*, your *Carnality*, your *Omissions* of Duty, your *careless* Performance of Duty, and your *unmortified Affections*; as you consider these, you will be convinced more and more of your own Vileness, and, when before God, be ready to stile yourself the *chief of Sinners*, because your Obligations, your Engagements, your Mercies have been so great and numerous. The more we are like God, the more humbling Views we have of ourselves. Sin and Holiness are two Opposites. As Sin increases, our Aversion to Holiness increases. So, on the other hand, as Holiness increases, we see more of the Malignity of Sin, and appear more and more odious in our own Eyes, even so as to think ourselves *more vile* than others, though we have not been guilty of any gross Abominations. — Let us now apply what has been said to ourselves; and that we may come to some Conclusion concerning our own State,

1. Let us carefully examine into our Sense of Sin. — You may not have so deep a Sense of Sin, as some around you have. You may be afraid that you see not enough of its Odiousness, and of your own Wretchedness. — Are you convinced that you are guilty, helpless, miserable, blind and naked in yourselves? Do you hate and abhor yourselves on the Account of Sin? Do you desire to be delivered from it? Do you mourn
over

over it before the Lord? Cannot you depend upon your Services for Justification, they appearing all polluted, and therefore as an unfit Garment to cover you? Are you made sensible of your Need of Christ, and willing to receive him in *all* his Characters? Have you, under a Sense of Sin, been made *thankful* for a Saviour, been weaned from all *Self-dependence*, and been made to *fly* to him for *all Salvation*? You have Reason then to hope, that *God has brought you out of Darkness into his marvellous Light*, though your Sense of Sin may not be *so deep* and impressing, as it appears in some others.

2. Hence we see the *Weakness of Christians in general, in making that discouraging, which ought to be encouraging*. You are afraid that you see not enough of your own Hearts; you are daily praying therefore, that God would let you see more of the *Plague* that is in them. When he answers your Prayers, you are immediately *discouraged* at the View, and are crying, Will God ever look upon such Wretches as we are? Can all this be *consistent* with Grace?—You should rather be *thankful* for a deeper Sense and clearer Views of what you are by Nature. If indeed you grow *more cold*; if you omitted Duties, &c. you might take the Alarm: But if you find the *same Zeal* for God, and a *greater Humility*; if the Sight you have of your Hearts is improved by you, makes you appear more vile, and fills you with greater Self-abhorrence, and Thankfulness for a Saviour, rejoice, and look upon it as the *Work of the Spirit of God*, and an *Evidence* of your Growth in Grace.

3. Let us look more into our own Hearts, and be often considering the dreadful Nature and Demerit of Sin. When we see that we are the same by Nature as the vilest; when we view the Wickedness of our Hearts, we may
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be stirred up to admire the Grace of God in sending his Son into the World to save such; we may be quickened to adore him for making a Difference between us and others, and for giving us any Hopes of Deliverance from Sin. It will tend to keep us ever humble, to make us value the Redeemer more, and to rejoice in that Fullness of Merit and Grace that is in him. And indeed we should never look upon Sin, but *upon Christ too*, else we shall be ready to sink into Discouragement. Whilst we view *the one to humble us*, let us view *the other to encourage us*, and then we shall say with the Apostle, Rom. vii. 25. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

4. *We may improve this Subject by way of Conviction.* You are all Sinners by Nature, lost Sinners; even you, who may think you have a Righteousness that is blameless. You, who have not run into open, notorious Sins, but have been sober and regular, *you are wretched and miserable, blind and naked.* Oh, that I could fasten the Conviction upon you! But this is your Unhappiness, you are miserable, *and you see it not*; you will not believe it. Let me tell you, and I tell you the Truth, I lie not, that you must see yourselves in this wretched Condition, or you will never apply aright to Christ for Salvation. I must tell you, and I can say it is out of a real Concern for your Souls, that, notwithstanding all your Duties, and all your good Works, yet, if you have not a Sense of your guilty, miserable Condition; if you have not fled to Christ under that Sense, as naked, perishing Sinners, *you are not fit for the Kingdom of God.* A hard Saying it may appear, but nothing is a greater Truth. You are some of those, concerning whom our Lord says, *that Publicans and Harlots shall go into the Kingdom of Heaven before them*, Matth. xxi. 31. You
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are such as are endeavouring to *establiſh* * a Righteouſneſs of your own, not ſubmitting yourſelves to the Righteouſneſs of God. The Lord open your Eyes, and give you a Senſe of Sin, that you may deſpair and die in yourſelves, and, as helpleſs, miſerable Creatures, may look to him, who alone can deliver you from the Wrath to come. May we all ſay, Even ſo, Lord Jeſus, let it be. Amen.

* Rom. 10. 3.

CASE

C A S E XVII.

When a Person has received a temporal Mercy, which he prayed for, how shall he know whether it is granted in Answer to Prayer, and comes to him as a Covenant Blessing?

 T ought to be the Concern of every Person, that has any Regard for his own Soul, to see that his temporal Mercies come to him with a divine Blessing. Such a pious Concern as this excited a Friend to put this Question to me; and, seeing the Importance of it, I have therefore ventured to take it under Consideration, and shall do these three Things: 1. State the Question itself. 2. Give a Solution to it. 3. Make an Improvement of it.

I. *As for the Question itself*, I conceive it to stand in the following Light. A Person, who hopes he has experienced the Love of God in a Covenant Way, is earnestly desirous to receive every Mercy, as coming from the Hand of a Covenant God, with Love in his Heart, with a Smile in his Countenance, and with the Addition of his Blessing. The gracious Soul is supposed to have been in earnest with God for a particular, important Favour of divine Providence; the Consequence of which has been, that God has been pleased to grant him the Mercy he requested. He is therefore ready to hope that it comes in Answer to Prayer, and desires that his
Heart

Heart may be affected with it, not only as a providential Favour, but likewise as an Instance and Token of God's special Love. But he is desirous to know, how he shall be assured that it comes as a Token of the divine Acceptance; and would be glad to be certified, whether he may venture to look upon the present providential Favour in this encouraging Light. He knows it is the very Mercy he has prayed for; he knows likewise it is such a Favour as calls for special Gratitude, and his Conscience tells him that his Soul was enlarged in Prayer for it. These Things then he is well assured of: But at the same time he sees he cannot from hence positively conclude, that the Favour is sent in Answer to Prayer; and if it be, he cannot from hence be certain that it comes with a divine Blessing. For he is ready to suspect, that he has been too eager in his Supplications for a temporal Blessing; that he has laid too great a Stress upon it; and therefore fears, though it be granted, it may be given to him not in Love, but in Anger. He is therefore very desirous to know in what Manner, and upon what Plan, he may judge in this Affair; whether the Favour comes in Anger or in Love; and whether he may humbly depend upon a divine Blessing, to make it turn out for his real and spiritual Good. And doubtless nothing would be Matter of greater Joy and Pleasure to a gracious Soul, than to have Reason to conclude, that a divine Blessing will attend the providential Mercy received; and, on the other hand, nothing can be a greater Damp to a serious Mind, than to have a prevailing Suspicion, that what is granted will rather prove a Snare and Stumbling-block, than a Covenant Blessing. This is the Question: But to amplify it a little, I would endeavour to make it familiar by an Instance or two. You know that every Christian prays that God would
give

give him Day by Day his necessary Food. Now this temporal Favour is what God gives unto those that do not pray for it, and have no Sense of their Dependence upon him for it: Neither can we be sure that our daily Provision is sanctified to us, merely because we pray for it, and God gives it. Again, Perhaps in some special Cases we pray for a Deliverance out of some great Trouble, or for the granting of some important Favour in Providence: And since it does not immediately follow, that these special Mercies granted will be attended with a divine Blessing, the Question still remains, How shall we know whether they come in Covenant Love? I would therefore now proceed,

II. *To give a Solution* to this serious and experimental Question. And here let it be observed, that *three* or *four* Things are previously necessary to assure us that what we receive comes to us in a Covenant Way.

I. *The Person praying must be one in Covenant with God.* One who is destitute of saving Blessings may be so far led into the Knowledge of divine Providence, as to be stirred up to pray for a temporal Mercy; yea, and to be thankful for it, when he has received it: And yet this cannot assure him that it will be really blessed to him. God may hear the Cries, and answer the Requests, of an unregenerate Person; and yet, after all, there is still a Curse upon his Basket and Store: For we know, that, as to unrenewed Persons, their very Prosperity is cursed. Thus God heard *Ahab*, when he humbled himself; and yet it does not appear that he was ever savingly renewed. Thus the *Mariners* in *Jonah's* Ship prayed every one to his God, and the Lord answered their Request; but we have no Reason to think that their Deliverance came as a Covenant Blessing to them. Let not any therefore presume to infer that they are interested in
God's

God's special Love, merely because he answers their Prayers with Respect to temporal Favours. But if thou art a Person in Covenant, and hast an Interest in the Blessings of Grace, thou hast then the more Reason to hope that what is granted comes with a Blessing. *For we know that all Things work together for Good to them that love God,* Rom. viii. 28. No temporal Mercy can come as a Covenant Blessing to a Person who is destitute of saving Grace, unless it be made a Means of bringing him to Christ; but it may be granted as such to one who is already in Christ by a vital Union to him.

2. *The Mercy prayed for must be such as is lawful for us to ask at the Hands of God.* Sometimes the Desires of the Children of Men, nay, and of the Children of God too, are so wild and irregular, that they seek after what would rather be hurtful than helpful to them: And if we were allowed to chuse for ourselves in all temporal Cases, we should many a Time make a wretched Choice; yea, and if God was to answer such Requests, he would do it not in Love, but in Anger. Thus we find the *Israelites* asked *Flesh* for their Lusts, *and he gave them their Request, but sent Leanness into their Souls,* Psalm cvi. 15.

3. *The View of the Mind in asking the Blessing must likewise be lawful.* Perhaps we may desire a particular Favour, in order to gratify our Pride, to indulge our Lusts, or to be at a greater Liberty to enjoy ourselves, without bringing any Glory to God. Now, when a Person prays for a temporal Favour with such Views, he has no Reason to expect it will be granted him, or, if granted, that it will be a Blessing to him. For it is a Mocking of God to ask a temporal Favour with such a View: And it would be rather a Mercy, than a Judgment, for God to deny such a Request.

James iv. 3. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your Lusts. We should therefore look well to our Aims and Ends in praying for a providential Mercy, if we hope to have it granted in Love.

4. *The Methods taken to obtain the Mercy sought should likewise be lawful.* For however valuable the Favour may be in itself; yet, if it be obtained in an unlawful Manner, we have no Reason to expect the divine Blessing upon it. It is true God may, and sometimes does, bring Good out of Evil; as in the Case of *Jacob's* obtaining his Father's Blessing by Fraud. But this must be no Pattern to us: Nor can we expect that God should smile upon unlawful Means; and though they should prove successful, it is a thousand to one but what is obtained becomes a *Snare, a Trap, a Stumbling-block and a Recompence to us.* Rom. xii. 9.

These four Things, I say, must be previously supposed; otherwise we can have no Reason to think that the Mercy received will be a real Blessing to us. And I farther apprehend, that supposing we are right in these four Particulars, yet these of themselves are not sufficient to ascertain the present important Point. For some other Thoughts must be added, in order to give us Ground to conclude that what we receive comes in a Covenant Way.

Are you then earnestly desirous to know whether a special temporal Mercy comes with a divine Smile and Blessing? I must beg you to make the following Enquiries.

1. Enquire whether you *have prayed* for it as a Covenant Blessing. If our Hearts are right with God, and our Minds in a proper Frame, when engaged in the Duty of Prayer; we do not ask for any Mercy whatsoever, but

with a higher View than as a temporal Favour. We seek such a Mercy, that God may be glorified, that our Souls may be endeared to him, that we may be rendered more capable to honour him by what he gives us. We desire to receive it from Christ, not only as King of Providence, but likewise as King of Grace. We are willing to forego the Mercy, if God sees it will not be for his Glory and our Good to grant it; and we dread the Thoughts of receiving any Favour merely as a temporal one. It is in the Nature of true Prayer in such a Case to look abundantly above and beyond the Mercy sought, howsoever desirable it may be to Flesh and Blood. True Prayer teaches us to seek such a Favour as a Branch of the Covenant; as a Mercy that would subserve the Glory of God's Name and our spiritual Good. We desire that the Father may be glorified in it, not only as a God of Providence, but as a God of Grace. We desire that the Son may be glorified by it, as a Fruit of his redeeming Love and Grace. We desire that the Holy Spirit may be glorified in it, by making it effectual for quickening, humbling and endearing Purposes. Now, if these are our real Views in seeking after a temporal Mercy, we have the highest Reason to think, that when it is granted, it comes from a Covenant God, attended with the Blessing of Christ, and the Influences of his Spirit.

2. Enquire whether you *received it* as a Covenant Blessing. When it came into your Hands, or when it was bestowed upon your Persons or Families, be solicitous to observe with what Frame of Spirit you received it. Was it merely as a temporal Favour? Was it merely with Thankfulness, because God had been so good to you, as thereby to encrease your Substance, your Family or Reputation? If this was all, you have Reason to fear, that it has not come in a Covenant Channel.

Channel. But if, on the contrary, you have been made to see something of the Connection between temporal Mercies and spiritual Blessings, and have received the present Mercy as a Token of God's Love; and, if in its Reception, it made such an Impression upon your Souls, as endeared your Hearts to a God of Grace, and stirred up your Desires to spend and employ it for God in Christ; this is a happy Token, that God has granted it as a real Blessing.

3. Enquire whether you *enjoy it* as a Covenant Blessing. Now you have the Mercy, doubtless you rejoice in it, and are thankful for it; but how do you enjoy it? Oh! there is a great deal of Difference between the Enjoyment that a Believer has of a Mercy when in a right Frame, and that Enjoyment of it which others have. Unrenewed Persons can taste a natural Sweetness in a temporal Mercy, and can enjoy it with a natural Pleasure; but the Believer in a right Frame can take a spiritual Pleasure, and taste a spiritual Sweetness, in the Enjoyment of it. It is the real Desire of a true Believer, *in the Want of all Things to enjoy all in God, and in the Fullness of all Things to enjoy God in all.*

4. Enquire whether you endeavour *to improve* the Mercy as a Covenant Blessing. You have now got what you prayed for; and what do you desire now to do with it? Are you for making the best of it only in a natural Way, and upon carnal Principles? Or, are you for improving it in a Way of Gratitude to the God of Grace, who has freely given you his Son, and has in him, and with him, freely given you this and every other Mercy you are Partakers of?

If you can conscientiously and seriously give an Answer in the Affirmative to the foregoing Questions upon a close Examination, you may then with the utmost Certainty conclude, that what you have received comes

to you in a Covenant Way, and will be blessed to you and yours to answer the most desirèable and spiritual Purposes.

III. I come now to the *third* General; and that is, to make some Improvement of the whole; which shall be done by the two following Remarks.

1. *How unhappy are all Unbelievers, even in their best Enjoyments!* They may indeed spend their Days in Pleasure, Honour and Wealth; they may have, as to this World, more than Heart could wish: But it is their great Misery, that in all these Things they know not God, and therefore can have no real Enjoyment of him. Alas! what are all their Pleasures worth, while they enjoy them with a Curse? These temporal Mercies, unless free Grace prevent, will be only found to be a feeding them up unto the Day of Slaughter. There is such an awful Curse upon all the Possessions and Enjoyments of the Unbeliever, that *in the midst of Laughter the Heart is sorrowful, and the End of this Mirth is Heaviness.*

2. See hence, *what is the best Method to attain the sweetest Enjoyment of what we have.* O my Brethren! if you desire to have a true Relish of your Mercies; esteem it a poor mean Thing to have Riches, Honours and Pleasures, without God. Let it be your first Concern to seek after an Interest in the Covenant of Grace; and then see to it, that all you receive comes from the Hands of God with a Design for your spiritual and everlasting Good. And if you can arrive to this happy Frame of Spirit, it will lighten every Cross, and add a double Sweetness to every Enjoyment: For temporal Mercies are upon this Account abundantly sweeter to Believers than to any others. The Creature of itself is vain and insufficient. Its Pleasures, however delicate, are either defective or cloying: The Honours that the Creature can bestow, however elevated,

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are empty and despicable: And the Supplies which the Creature can afford, however opulent, are uncertain and unsatisfying. Such they will be found to be by every one that observes his own Experience, or has the least Notion of what is truly good and great. To those who are destitute of the Grace of God, they are perpetually ensnaring and polluting, and will prove rather a Preparation for Hell than for Heaven. But if a Person be made a Partaker of Christ, and is enabled to maintain Communion with God, he will find the Creature sanctified, blessed and sweetened to him; he will have such a Relish of it, as will abundantly surpass all the Pleasure that the carnal Man can enjoy, or even conceive.

But I cannot represent this most spiritual and heavenly Experience better than by transcribing a Letter to a Friend, dictated by the eminently pious *Edward Polhill, Esq;* of the last Age, after he had lost his Sight: A Letter, which shews a Heart full of Love to God, and lifted up above the Creature in Communion with him.

Worthy SIR,

“ **Y**OURS I received, and return many Thanks
 “ to you for your Kindness and Prayers. I am
 “ blind, but, bless God, content. All that he doth is
 “ wise and just. All that comes in his Will is wel-
 “ come. His Choice is better than mine. Eyes might
 “ have blinded, but Blindness shall enlighten me. God
 “ hath not cast me off, but called me aside into the in-
 “ visible World. There Jesus Christ is the only Sun.
 “ Mercy is as a Sea of infinite Sweetness for Faith to
 “ bathe in. The Promises are as green Pastures of
 “ Comfort. God himself is the Dew, that makes a
 “ Spring of Graces in the Heart. Heavenly Truths are

“ the Firmament over our Heads. The pure Air is the
“ Holy Spirit breathing in Saints and Ordinances. In
“ this World the Blind have a Prospect, and may see
“ the Land afar off, which lieth beyond the Line of
“ Time in another World. I may say it is good being
“ here. I cannot see outward Things; but the new
“ Creature in the Heart is a better Sight than all the
“ World. I cannot read the Letters in the Bible;
“ but if I have the quickening Spirit, it is enough.
“ The Covenant may be felt in the Heart. The Pro-
“ mises may bud and blossom into Graces, and Notions
“ may fire and be inflamed into holy Love. The
“ Veil is upon my Eyes; but my Work is to rend off
“ the Veil of Time from my Heart, and to look into
“ Eternity; to put back all Creatures, and to have all
“ in God, Eyes and all; and this is the greatest Pos-
“ session. If I have all Things in themselves, I have
“ them but in a finite Sphere; but if I have them all in
“ God, I have them eminently, and in a Kind of Infi-
“ nity. In waiting I wait upon the Lord, till he incline
“ and give me Eagle’s Wings of Faith and Love to soar
“ up to him. Near enough to him I cannot be. O
“ that I were unearthed and unselfed, that my Soul
“ might be in perpetual Ascensions to him, my Love
“ going forth in Raptures after him! O for the Cir-
“ cumcision of the Heart! If the Film were off mine
“ Eyes, I should see the outward World; but if the
“ Flesh were off my Heart, I should love the blessed
“ God, which is infinitely better. Through Grace I
“ hope to come to that blessed Region, where God is
“ all. In his Light we shall see Light, and in his Love
“ we shall be for ever inflamed to him. But I forget
“ myself, and run out, but not beyond the Pardon of
“ my good Friend.

“ My

“ My kind Salutes to yourself, and begging all your
“ Prayers, I take leave, and subscribe myself,

“ *Your obliged Friend and Servant,*

“ Edward Polhill.”

O that there were such a Spirit breathing in each of us ! Then we should know what it is to receive, enjoy, and improve every temporal Mercy as a new Covenant Blessing.

CASE XVIII.

How may a Christian know that he grows in Grace?

✻ I ✻ T is a Question of some peculiar Weight that I have before me. The Resolution of it has a Tendency to remove the Christian's Fears, help him in examining his Soul, and to stir him up to a holy Diligence and Watchfulness in his spiritual Course, that he may not be trifling and slothful, but be pressing on towards the Mark, and so be making some Progress in his Way to Zion. And here I shall,

I. Make a few Observations, that may be necessary to clear this important Point. And,

II. Mention a few Instances, wherein it will appear, that the Christian, notwithstanding all the Opposition he meets with, really grows in Grace.

I. I would make a few Observations, that may be necessary to clear this important Point. And,

1. *Growth in Grace is in general imperceptible to the Christian himself.* It is, for the most Part, of a very gradual Nature; like a *Plant*, which grows insensibly; or like a *Babe*, which becomes stronger and taller, till at length he has all the Proportions of a Man; and yet you see not how this is done. You find in Time an Alteration, but you cannot perceive the Steps by which he approaches nearer and nearer to Manhood. Thus it

is

is with the Christian. He is first a *Babe*, being weak in Knowledge and Grace; then he is a *young Man*, and after that a *Father* *. These bespeak great Improvement; and yet this is in general so gradual, that the Christian is *insensible* of it. He is at first a *Plant*; but afterwards may be compared to a *Tree*, and so goes on oftentimes, till at length he becomes a *tall Cedar* in *Lebanon*; and yet the Steps by which he ascends to this Height in Stature are *chiefly* imperceptible.

2. *Sometimes Growth in Grace is more quick and visible.* God does great Work in a little Time. Some Christians make great Improvements, and come *soon* to a State of Manhood. They ripen apace for a better World, and make great Advances in the divine Life. When God is as *Dew* to their Souls, they *revive as the Corn*, grow as the *Vine*, shoot forth their Branches, and make a green and flourishing Appearance. *When the Sun of Righteousness arises upon them with Healing under his Wings, they go forth, and grow up as Calves of the Stall*, Mal. iv. 2. As the Sun in his Return from the Winter Solstice by his Warmth nourishes frozen Nature, and makes it look green and beautiful; so when the *Sun of Righteousness*, after some long Time of Withdrawment, comes to shine again upon the Soul, he feels the Warmth of his reviving Beams, and finds a glorious and sudden Alteration. He is then like *Calves of the Stall*, which are fitting for Slaughter, and therefore make much quicker Improvements than those that are in the open Field: The Christian,

* The Apostle *John* addresses Christians according to their Rank and Standing in Religion. He writes to *Babes*, or to those who are young Christians, and therefore weak in Faith and Understanding; to *young Men*, or to such as were stronger, more vigorous and lively, and therefore fit to encounter with Difficulties; and to *Fathers*, or to those of Age and Experience in Christianity; in all which he alludes to the different Stages of the natural Life, from one to the other of which there is a gradual Ascent.
1 *John* ii. 12, 13, 14, 18.

stian, like them, grows fat, and makes very visible Advancements in Holiness. When God fills the Pool of Ordinances with his heavenly Rain, we are sensible of it, feel the Refreshment, and go from Strength to Strength.

3. *We may, upon the whole, have made some Progress in the Christian Life, though for the present we may appear to be going backward.* Some Corruption may for the present harass our Souls, and have led us aside. We may by some Neglect or other have grieved the Holy Spirit, and he may have left us for a Time, and so we may appear to be in a declining and withering Condition, *though, upon the whole, we may have made some Progress in Grace, and may have got some Cubits added to our spiritual Stature, since we gave up ourselves to Christ.* A Child may have some Indisposition, which may prevent his Growth for a Time; yet he may have got much Strength, when compared with *what he was at first.* David lay asleep some Time, and gave no Evidences *then* of any Growth in Grace; yet doubtless he *had* made Advancements in a Conformity to God, though *now* a Corruption leads him into Captivity. From all this then we learn, that we must not compare ourselves with *yesterday*, if we would know whether we have got any more Steps in our Way to Heaven. It might be *much better* with us yesterday than to-day, as to the Frame of our Souls, and yet we may in *general* have got *some Ground.* If we would know our Growth, we must look back to the Time, when we *first* gave up ourselves to the Redeemer, if we can remember it, and compare ourselves *now* with ourselves *then.*

4. *We may grow in one Respect, though we may not grow in all.* A Tree in Winter may appear to be dead; but it is indeed alive, and is gathering Strength, though it is not beautified with Blossoms, or loaded with Fruit.

Thus

Thus the Christian has his Winter Seasons, yet he is making *some* Progress. In Adversity, when under afflictive Dispensations, the Buffetings of Satan, under spiritual Darkeness and Discouragements, he *may* grow, though his Faith may not be so strong, his Affections so lively, and his Soul so comfortable as he could wish. Some Dispensations may be more suited to bring *one* Grace into Exercise than another. If *any* Grace is strengthened, and we are got in any Measure nearer to Christ, we are then *growing Christians*. Some form to themselves Marks and Evidences of Growth in Grace, and if they come not up to that Standard, they conclude that they are going backward; whereas, if we grow in *one Respect*, we ought to be thankful, though we do not see that we grow in all.

5. *We are not to judge of our spiritual Growth by the Growth of others.* Some with whom we are acquainted have perhaps made great Advances in Grace. They have great Knowledge, can reason solidly about the Gospel: Their Zeal is lively, their Faith is strong, their Hearts appear warm, and they seem to have much Communion with God. Because we find not the *same Gifts* and *Measures of Grace* in ourselves, but perhaps a Coldness, a sad Indifferency, &c. we are ready to conclude that we have *no Grace*, especially that we are far from being *growing Christians*, not considering that there are *different Degrees* in different Persons. Nay, we do not consider that these have their Corruptions, their inward Struggles, their dead Seasons, as well as others. Because we are not all *Pauls*, must we therefore say that we are *not Christians at all*? Because we do not find the *same Degrees of Love* to Ordinances as *David* did, must we say that we have *none at all*? These would be strange
and

and very unfair Conclusions. Thus, these Things being observed, I now come,

II. To shew when the Christian may be said to grow in Grace. Amongst other Things, I would mention these following: As,

1. *Growth in Grace discovers itself in an Increase of spiritual Light and Knowledge.* To see more of Sin is (as we have observed under another Case) a real Sign that the Work is carrying on. It was by the Light of the Spirit alone, that we first saw the Wickedness of our Hearts, and a Loathsomeness in Sin; and it is by this Light that our Views of it grow clearer and more distinct. *When the Commandment came*, the boasting Pharisee saw himself a Sinner, Rom. vii. 9. To see more and more of ourselves tends to bring us into a more evangelical Frame, and so to make us appear more like the Followers of Christ. —As we see more of ourselves, so, as the Work is carrying on in us, *we see more of Jesus Christ*; the Greatness and Amiability of his Person, the Virtue of his Sacrifice, the Triumphs of his Cross, and the Importance of his Intercession. Upon the whole, when we see more Vileness in ourselves, and more Beauty in Christ; more of our own Emptiness, and of his Fullness; more of our own Weakness, and of his Strength; more of the Insufficiency of our own Righteousness to justify us before God, and of the Glory of his; and, in a Word, more of our Wretchedness and Nakedness, and of his Suitableness and Excellency, we may be said to grow in Grace.

2. *When we are enabled to go more out of ourselves, and depend more upon Christ, we may be said to grow in Grace.* The young Christian is ready to place too much Dependence upon his Frames. If in Duties his Affections are not sweetly raised, he is ready to conclude such Duties

ties to be *lost*. When he finds a Dullness, a Contraction, a Straitness in his Frame, he fears that he has no Experience of the Grace of God. He is too ready to depend upon his *Resolutions*: When *led* aside by any Corruption, he resolves against it, and goes too much in his own Strength. Under spiritual Darkness, or afflictive Dispensations, he gives too much way to Discouragement, and often refuses to be comforted. If then we are enabled to lay a *less Stress* upon Frames, and look more to Christ, leaving our Souls with him; if we are more *sensible* of our Weakness, and *depend more* upon the Strength of the great Redeemer; if, when Satan buffets, and God afflicts, we are enabled to leave ourselves with Christ, pleading his Righteousness, and waiting for his Salvation; if under a deeper Sense of our Emptiness we go to Christ's Fullness, cleave to and trust in him, resolving, that if we perish, to *perish at his Feet*, it is a Sign that we are *growing in Grace*.

3. *We are making some Advances, when we find a true Relish for Duties, and grow more spiritual in them.* Young Christians have generally more Fire than Solidity. They are, says Dr. Goodwin, like new musical Instruments; they have more Varnish than old ones, but they give not so sweet a Sound. Their Zeal and Affection often carry them *beyond* their Duty. They are ready to think that they must pray *so often*, spend *so much Time* in Duties, or they cannot be Christians. But, as they grow in Grace, they find a *Relish* for Duty, see its great Importance, and attend to it in its *proper Place*. They grow more settled and solid. They have juster Conceptions of God. Their Obedience flows more from Love. Their Services are more evangelical. They attend to Duty more in its proper Season, and give every Duty its just Weight. When indeed we find a growing
Coldness

Coldness to Duty, an Indifference, Carelessness and Negligence, we have Reason to fear a Decline: But when we have a true Relish for Duties, and are more spiritual in them, it is a Sign we are *making Progress in Holiness*.

4. *We make Advances in Grace, when we are more humble, submissive and thankful.* An humble Frame is that which the *whole Gospel* is calculated to bring us into, and which the Spirit by all his Works in us promotes. The more we are sunk in our own Apprehensions then, the lower we lie, the more detestable we appear, and the more we shew of the Christian. — The growing Christian has more of an *humble Submission* to the Dispensations of Providence. When Afflictions first come upon us, we are like *Bullocks unaccustomed to the Yoke*; our proud, rebellious Hearts are ready to rise against God: But, as we make Advances, we are brought to justify God, and to acquiesce in all his Proceedings. — “Lord, this proud Heart would fain rebel; but, oh, take thine own Way with me. *Wherefore should a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins?* I would be dumb, not opening my Mouth against any Part of thy Conduct, but cheerfully giving up myself and my all to thy Disposal, saying, Chuse my Inheritance for me.” — As the Christian grows, he is brought into a more *thankful and admiring Frame*. He admires the Riches of Grace, and this is more and more his Language: — “Lord, why me? why was my Name enrolled in the Book of Life? Why didst thou call, renew and sanctify me? Am I an Heir of God? Will Heaven be my Inheritance? Oh, the Grace, the infinite Grace and Compassion of God! &c.” — *This is the very Frame of the Saints in Heaven.* Who more *humble* than they are, who more *thankful*? They are ever adoring divine Grace, placing the
the

the Crown upon their Redeemer's Head, and giving God all the Glory *. The more therefore we are brought into this Frame, the greater Progress we are making in the Christian Life.

5. *We grow in Grace, when we find our Corruptions weaker, and the Power of Sin more and more subdued in us.* There was a Time, Christian, when thy poor silly foolish Heart was ready to fall in with every Temptation; when thy Corruptions were strong, and often leading thee into Captivity. But hast thou by divine Grace got a greater Freedom from them? Hast thou been enabled to mourn over them, pray against them, and to bring them to the Cross of Christ, and get them mortified and slain? Do not Pride, Passion, Envy, Discontent and Carnality reign as much as usual? Art thou then more upon thy Guard, and dost thou find thy Soul more at Liberty, than before? *This is a Sign of Growth in Grace.*

Finally, *When we find less of an earthly, and more of an heavenly Disposition, we may be said to grow in Grace.* When our Esteem for this World is sinking, our Attachment to it weaker; when our Affections are often withdrawn from it, and we find greater Desires to converse with God, and to look above; when Heaven grows more pleasing and familiar, and we, something like the Inhabitants above, are filled with a warmer Zeal for God, and desire to honour him by a more active and lively Obedience; when we find a growing Concern to be dead to present Things, and to have a greater Love to *Jesus*, a stronger Faith in him, and an encreasing Conformity to him, *we may comfortably conclude that we grow in Grace.*—I would conclude this Subject by a Reflection or two. And,

* Rev. v. 9—13.

1. *How awful is their Case, who are absolute Strangers to the Grace of God!* To be conformed to God is the greatest Glory and the greatest Happiness of a Creature. What can render us *more amiable*, than to have the divine Image in us; what can *more contribute* to our real Felicity? It is Heaven to be like *Christ* *. It is absolutely necessary to our Communion with him on Earth, to our full Enjoyment of him above. You then, who are Strangers to the new Creature, have no Degree of Fitness for a better World. What could Heaven be to you, but a tiresome Place? Could you exult in God as your highest Happiness? Could you join the Church triumphant in chearful, unwearied and everlasting Ascriptions of Praise to God and to the Lamb? Sit but down, and seriously consider this, and thou must soon be convinced that thy Hopes of Happiness are absolutely vain, inasmuch as thou art under the Power of Sin, hast no Relish for spiritual Services, and consequently no real Fitness for Heaven. Let me beseech thee to consider thy present dangerous and awful Condition; and oh, seek to be a Christian indeed, that thou mayst not be pleasing thyself with Expectations of Salvation, and at last meet with a Disappointment. This has been the Case with many. *They thought themselves rich, and increased with Goods, when they were poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.* They rejected every Admonition, turned off every Exhortation from themselves, and would not believe the awful Truth, that they were *Children of Wrath*, and *dead in Trespasses and Sins*; but cried *Peace, Peace*, till sudden and everlasting Destruction came upon them, and it was too late to seek for Grace, and look for Mercy. This, deplorable as it is, will be thy Condition, O graceless Soul, if Death should come upon thee, whilst thou art persuading thyself that all

* 1 John iii. 2.

is well. Let me beseech thee therefore to *consider the Things that belong unto thy Peace, before they are for ever hid from thine Eyes.* To be summoned before the Tribunal of God, there to be weighed, and pronounced too light; to hear the awful Word, *depart*; to see the bottomless Pit opening, and no Way of Escape, no Deliverer near; but to see the now compassionate *Jesus*, then refusing to stretch forth his Arm to help thee, to hear him crying, “Thou infatuated Creature, thou art ruined for ever: *I once called, but thou didst refuse; I once stretched out my Hand, but thou didst not regard it; I now will laugh at thy Calamity, and mock now thy Fear cometh upon thee; thou mayst now call, but I will not answer; thou mayst seek me earnestly, but thou shalt not find me*”—Oh think, think, I intreat thee of this melancholy and distressing Scene; and let a Consideration of it engage thee to look into thy Heart, and to seek with the utmost Diligence after an Experience of the Grace of God to fit thee for the Enjoyments above, and after an Interest in the Righteousness of *Christ* to give thee a Title to them. Give God no Rest; but earnestly beg, that he would send his Spirit to make every Thing new in thy Heart, proclaim Liberty to thy captive Soul, lead thee to the Feet of the almighty Redeemer, and prepare thee for the Enjoyment of him.

2. *We see what should be our great Concern as Christians.* Not to be grasping after Honour, Riches, and the Emoluments of Earth and Time; not to gratify our Appetites in the Pleasures of Sense; but to be pursuing the Glory of God, and the Prosperity of our Souls. Is this, Christian what thou hast in daily View? Whilst thou art attending to the Affairs of thy Family, art thou not neglecting thy Soul? Dost thou ever enquire whether that is starving, or flourishing? Is it thy greatest Care

to grow in Grace? Art thou watchful therefore against every Sin, much in Prayer, frequent in Meditation and Self-examination; and art thou looking to *Christ* daily for all suitable Supplies, to enable thee to make Advances? Is it matter of Humiliation, that thou findest so much of the Body of Sin within thee, such Coldness to Duties, such Degrees of Ignorance, so much Carnality, spiritual Pride, &c.? Dost thou mourn before the Lord, that there is so little of a divine Temper, of thy Redeemer's Image, in thee? Dost thou breathe after Holiness, pray earnestly for the Spirit of Sanctification to cleanse thy Heart, and add some Cubits to thy spiritual Stature? To live a natural Life only, is not to live: It is only to breathe. Ye slothful Christians, awake, and consider, your Character, your Happiness, your Usefulness, all call upon you to seek after Progress in Grace. Oh, may this be your Motto, *For me to live is Christ!* Seek after more of *Christ* with you, and in you. Be not contented to be always Babes, but be thirsting after an Encrease of Strength, of Knowledge, of Faith, of Love, of every Grace, that it may be evident to all that you are not only Christians indeed, but that your Souls are in a healthy and prosperous Condition, and that it is your greatest Delight to be growing in Holiness and Usefulness.

3. *If we have any Reason to hope that we are growing in Grace, we should ascribe all the Glory to God. He is the Author and Finisher of Faith,* Heb. xii. 2. The same Grace, that said unto us Live, continues this Life. The same Power, that brought us first to God, must be still exerted, or else we shall soon return to Folly. It is not enough for Grace to be implanted; the Spirit must help us to bring it into Exercise. Has any Corruption been subdued, any Victory been gained, any

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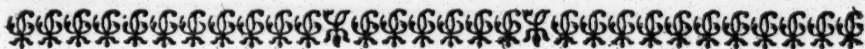
Progress been made in thy Race, any Cubit added to thy Stature? It is God who has done it. *The smoking Flax would soon be quenched, and the bruised Reed entirely broke*, if God was not to stand by thee, and help thee. *Thy Salvation is all of Grace.* Grace chose thee from Eternity; Grace called thee in Time: Grace sanctifies thee, and carries thee on from Strength to Strength; and at last the same free Grace will finish the Work, and bring thee into the immediate Presence of God. No wonder then, the Saints will for ever sing, *Grace, Grace.* May we learn the Song here, and walk under a deep Sense of unmerited Grace, till we come to that World, where we shall put the Crown upon our Redeemer's Head, and ascribe unwearied and everlasting Praises to Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and the Lamb.

4. *How glorious must Heaven be, where that Work, which God begins and carries on here, will be perfect! The End of Ordinances is for the perfecting of the Saints, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ, Eph. iv. 11, &c.* We are at best but Babes here, when compared with what we shall be. We are now under Age, and have our Inheritance in Prospect, not in Possession. Here we are fatigued with numberless Conflicts and Struggles with Sin and Satan. Now-and-then we get a Victory, but again we are overcome. We make but slow Progress in our Way. It is difficult to get near to God, and to grow into his Likeness. “But see, my Soul, Heaven is
“before thee: Heaven, where all thy Corruptions will
“be perfectly destroyed, and thou wilt have no more
“Enemies to contend with, no more Victories to gain,
“no more Struggles with thy own Heart, but the Con-

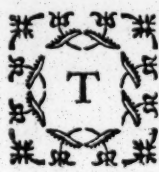
“quest will be fully thine, and the Top-stone will be
“laid in thy Salvation. See, Heaven is just at hand;
“where the new Creature will be perfect, and appear
“in all its beautiful and just Proportions; where thy
“*Understanding* will be freed from all the Remains of
“Darkness, thy *Will* be in sweet and everlasting Sub-
“jection to God, and thy *Heart* glow, burn with the
“purest Flame of divine Love. O happy Hour! de-
“fireable Period! when I shall put off the Body of Sin,
“and start into Perfection in a Moment; when I shall
“no longer see through a Glass darkly, but Face to
“Face; when I shall no longer be a Babe in Christ,
“but a perfect Man.” Awake, ye Saints, lift up your
Heads, for your Redemption draweth nigh. Get
upon Mount *Pisgah*, and view the heavenly Land,
where your weary Souls will be at everlasting Rest,
and all your Longings will be eternally satisfied with the
most perfect and exalted Enjoyments.



C A S E XIX.



How may a deserted Believer find out the particular Sin or Sins, whereby he has grieved the Spirit of God?

 HIS is doubtless a most searching and experimental Question, wherein there is a Necessity for the greatest Faithfulness to be used, both by him who resolves it, and by him who attempts to make use of it for himself. In many Cases it seems very difficult to point out to a Soul under Declensions, what is the particular Reason of the Spirit's Withdrawment. However, I shall attempt to bring this Matter as close home as I possibly can, recommending myself to every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God.

We must indeed acknowledge, that the Lord may, for wise and holy Ends, withdraw from his People those Comforts and Quickenings which they have been favoured with, and that without any immediate Respect unto any particular Sin or Sins committed by them. Sometimes this Withdrawment is rather for the *Prevention* of Sin, or for the *Discovery* of Sin, than as a *Punishment* for it. But generally divine Withdrawments are in Consequence of some Iniquity, whereby the holy Spirit has been grieved: And it is the Duty and Business of every gracious Soul, when he finds himself deprived of these Tokens of divine Love, which he hath usually enjoyed,

joyed, to ask this serious Question, "Why does the Lord thus contend with me?" And on all such Occasions he has Reason to suspect himself, as being the proper Cause of his Complaints. Thus the holy Psalmist seems to maintain a godly Jealousy over himself, when he says, *Psal. cxxxix. 24. Search me, O God, and know my Heart; try me, and know my Thoughts, and see if there be any wicked Way in me, and lead me in the Way everlasting.*

The Question under Consideration may be placed in this familiar and Soul-searching Light: A Believer that has been used to walk in the Light of God's Countenance, and under the quickening Influences of his Spirit, now finds that these Comforts are withdrawn from his Soul, and does not experience such a Spirituality of Frame as he used to do. He now feels himself in a declining Condition, his Faith weak, his Comforts low, his Graces not ready for Exercise. And notwithstanding all his Attempts by Prayer and Endeavour, he cannot arrive at that Spirituality and Comfort of Soul, which he once enjoyed; and therefore cries out with *Job, O that I were as in Months past, as in the Days when God preserved me; when his Candle shone upon my Head, and when by his Light I walked through Darkness!** Or, as the same holy Person at another Time, *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left Hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right Hand, that I cannot see him.*† This becomes a Matter of sad Complaint, and the Believer wants to know the Reason why it is thus with him. Feeling that the Spirit is withdrawn, he sees the greatest Reason to suspect that the Spirit has been grieved by him. When he comes to
search,

* Job xxix. 2. 3.

† Job xxviii. 8, 9

search, he perhaps, so far as he knows himself, is conscious that he has been kept from gross Immoralities and Enormities; for which Reason he cannot be certain what are the particular Sins for which he is thus visited. If indeed, upon Reflection, the Believer finds that he is fallen into some grievous Sin either of Heart or Life; in such a Case he cannot but know the Reason of the Visitation. Thus *David*, after the Commission of that complicated Sin of Murder and Adultery in the Matter of *Uriah*, could not but see the Reason of the present Declensions of his Frame, and the present Decay of his Comforts; and therefore cries out, *Psalms li. 11—14. Cast me not away from thy Presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the Joy of thy Salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Deliver me from Blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my Salvation.* Now then, if you are conscious to yourselves of any Enormity in your Practice, or any wilful Neglect of Duty, do not wonder if the quickening and comforting Influences of the divine Spirit are awfully suspended. We have a general Rule laid down, *1 John i. 6, 7.* which should be attended to with great Concern in the present Case. It consists of two Parts; the first is mentioned in the sixth Verse: *If we say we have Fellowship with him, and walk in Darkness, we lye, and do not the Truth.* The second Part is contained in the seventh Verse: *But if we walk in the Light, as he is in the Light, we have Fellowship one with another; and the Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all Sin.* From whence we may observe, that all those Comforts are delusive, which are consistent with the Love and Practice of Sin; and that those who are inclined to walk closely with God, may expect delightful Communion with him. But the present Case stands in this Light: Thou perhaps dost not feel that Delight

and Pleasure in spiritual Duties, nor that Spirituality of Frame, which thou wert wont to enjoy. From whence thou very justly suspectest, that the Spirit has been some way or other grieved by thee; but thou canst not be certain in what Manner it has been done, because thy Conscience does not charge thee with any gross Immorality and Defects. It is true, upon Inspection, thou seest Abundance of Corruption in thy Heart, but canst not point out the particular Sin or Corruption, which is the Ground of thy present Complaint. Thou wouldst therefore be glad to know how to discover it, on purpose that the Sin may be brought to the Cross of Christ in order to be crucified.

In Answer to this Question, doubtless, the first and grand Direction is this, to set about the Duty of Self-examination. O disconsolate Believer, ransack thine own Heart, look through it, look into it as deep as thou canst; and while thou art thus upon the Search, beg of God that he would examine and prove thee, that he would try thy Reins and thy Heart. But it may be, that thou hast been thus searching and inquiring, and art still at a Loss to fix thine Eye upon that Particular for which thou art visited. You will then ask, "What Rule can now be given?" and will be ready to say, that if you yourselves cannot find it out by Self-examination, how is it possible that any other should be able to do it? But yet I will venture at it, and would endeavour to act the most faithful and searching Part, and then leave the whole to your own Consciences to judge. Let me therefore give you three or four Directions, whereby you may be able to fix your Eyes upon the particular Sins for which the Lord withdraws from you. And,

1. I say, the *Sin which was the immediate Cause of your present Declensions, and which most prevails under them,*
is

is very likely to be the Reason of the present awful Visitation. Look back therefore, and observe the Time and Manner in which you fell into this declining, uncomfortable Way. Perhaps just at the Time when your Darknes began, you had some Impatience under the divine Hand, or perhaps you was left to slight or abuse those Quickenings and Comforts which you were favoured with. The Spouse in the *Canticles* seems to be sensible, that this must be the Sin by which the Spirit is grieved, *Cant. ii. 7. I charge you, O ye Daughters of Jerusalem, by the Roes and Hinds of the Field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my Love till he please.* You had been for a Time favoured with the divine Presence, and the Light of his Countenance; but you began to grow wanton upon these spiritual Privileges, to be careless about them, or to grow remiss in your Duty under the Enjoyment of them; or perhaps at this Time you gave way to the Rising of some particular Corruption; and immediately upon this the Spirit withdrew, and left you in Darknes and Distress, or under Coldnes and Indifference: If so, you may be very certain, that this was the particular Crime which grieved the Spirit.

And farther, take notice what is that Sin which most prevails under your present Declensions. This you will be able to learn by a little Inspection. And it is generally found, that the Sin which causes the Desertion is that which continues it; and as it has gained such an Advantage as to drive the Spirit away, it now rages and triumphs, and grows stronger and stronger, under these calamitous Experiences; whereby you may know, that this is the Sin which lies at the Bottom of your present Complaints.

2. *The Sin*, whatever it be, *which you are now for alleviating and excusing*, you have great Reason to think is
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that which caused and continues the divine Withdrawment. It may be, that under your present Darkneſs you look into your own Heart and Ways, and find a great many Corruptions working, and Sins prevailing, in your Souls. The more you look, the more you ſee the Corruption of your own Hearts, the Abominations that are working within you; and thoſe Things appear in ſuch Multitudes, that you know not which to fix upon, as the particular Cauſe of your Declenſions. And after all your Searches, it is not at all improbable, you may overlook the very Thing you are ſeeking after. For thoſe Sins and Corruptions which you are moſt ready to fix upon, are ſuch as you are ſenſible of, lament under, ſtrive and pray againſt; and theſe, however they may have cauſed, yet do not continue the divine Deſertion. Thoſe Sins which your Souls are for magnifying, and for which you are perpetually accusing yourſelves, you have the leaſt Reaſon to ſuſpect; becauſe ſo far as you thus ſee your Sins, it is a happy Token that the Spirit is preſent with you, as a Spirit of Humiliation. Look therefore farther, and ſee whether you are not making ſome Excuse for, or alleviating ſome of thoſe Evils which are in your Heart and Life; whether you are not for making them as little as poſſible, and endeavouring to throw off the Guilt of them from yourſelves. Now then, as ſoon as you can obſerve this Diſpoſition with reſpect to any Iniquity, you may immediately charge the Fault upon that particular Sin. For Inſtance: Have you been guilty of neglecting, or ſlightly performing ſecret, family, or publick Duties? Have you been negligent in keeping the Sabbath, or careleſs in the publick or private Exerciſes of God's Worſhip? Or have you conformed to any of the Vices and Vanities of the World? Perhaps in theſe Caſes your Hearts are ſaying,

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“It is true, I have occasionally neglected secret Prayer, or I have in some little Instances conformed to the Ways of the World; but this is no great Matter. I neglected secret Prayer, because my Heart was not in a Frame for it, or because I had not a clear Opportunity for it; and I have given into the Ways of the World, because there was some sort of Necessity for it.” And thus your Minds palliate your Offences; you are inclined to excuse your Negligence or Indifference; which plainly shews, that these Sins have gained and retain an awful Prevalency in you; and therefore you may take it for granted, that these are the Iniquities for which you now are visited.

3. *Those Sins in your Heart and Life, which you find the greatest Unwillingness to oppose,* are the Sins which cause or continue the Withdrawment. There are many Corruptions working, and many Temptations assaulting, to bring you into that which is contrary to the Law or Gospel. Some of these you can fight, strive, watch and pray against; others of them are so pleasing to your Flesh, or so suited to your Inclinations, that you cannot find in your Heart to make a vigorous Resistance against them: You may then take it for granted, that these latter lie at the Foundation of your spiritual Complaints.

4. *The Sins which you are ashamed or unwilling heartily to confess before the Lord,* are those by which the Spirit is grieved. Look attentively into your own Hearts, and perhaps you will find there is a Sin committed or indulged by you, which you are for keeping secret in your own Bosom. You cannot confess it with a true Freedom and Sincerity; and, as you are attempting to enumerate your Transgressions before the Lord in a Way of Confession, perhaps there is one (or two) starts up in your Remembrance, which you find yourselves unwilling to acknowledge

knowledge to be so sinful as it really is, and as your Conscience and Judgment inform you it is. In this Case, you know in your own Conscience that you cannot frankly confess the Sin before God; because your Heart is wedded to it, and you are unwilling to part with it. If it be thus, you need no longer be at a loss to know what it is that hides the Light of God's Countenance from you. But could you now without Reserve pray and plead, and watch and strive against that Sin, which you find thus cleaving to your Soul, you would probably be immediately delivered, and find the Spirit of Life and Comfort restored to you. We have a clear Instance of this in *Psalms* xxxii. 5. where we find the Psalmist had been withholding himself from a frank Confession; and so long as he thus kept Silence, his Guilt and his Distress remained and increased; but as soon as ever he said in his Heart, *I will confess my Transgression to the Lord*, then God *forgave him the Iniquity of his Sin*.

Thus I have endeavoured, in the plainest and most faithful Manner I could, to lead you to the Knowledge of those Sins, which are the Causes of your spiritual Complaints. And it is very evident, from the Nature of the Thing, that these must be the Sins that separate between you and your God. For those Iniquities that you truly hate, that you lament under, that you desire to confess before the Lord, and to carry to the Cross of Christ to be crucified there, are not the Sins that maintain the Distance between God and you: But those Iniquities, whether spiritual or external, whether in Heart or Life, which you have such an Affection for, that you cannot heartily condemn yourselves for them, cannot confess without Reserve before the Lord, that you cannot find in your Hearts to oppose with Vigour, these must of Necessity cause a continued Distance between
God

God and your Souls. These are the Iniquities which are peculiarly provoking to God ; these are the Sins that harden the Heart, that benumb the Conscience, and tarnish the Soul. And remember, that you can never expect a Return of the divine Quickenings and Comforts, until you can lay your Hand upon these Sins, can heartily pray against them, and can fly to the Lord Jesus Christ to have them pardoned and subdued.

Permit me to conclude this Soul-searching Subject by a few necessary and important Advices upon the whole.

1. *Beware of extenuating or excusing any Sin. He that hideth his Sins shall not prosper.* But yet this is what we are very prone to. When we are under a Temptation to any Neglects of Duty, our corrupt Hearts will appear very ready to find out many Excuses. They will suggest to us, either that the Duty is too hard for us to undertake, or that we have not an Opportunity for it, or that there will be no great Advantage reaped by it. Thus we are often betrayed into a criminal Omission of what the Lord calls for from us. And no wonder then, if the Spirit be grieved, and we soon feel the sad Effects of indulging spiritual Sloth ; no wonder, if our Communion with God be interrupted, if Corruption gains an Advantage, and a Shyness between God and our Souls be produced.

Again, When we are prevailed upon to neglect an incumbent Duty, our corrupt Hearts will now proceed to alleviate the Fault, and to make many Excuses for it, in order to hinder us from a free Acknowledgment of it, and Repentance for it ; and so we grow more and more hardened and careless, whereby the grieved Spirit is still more grieved, and the Separation between God and our Souls is continued and widened.

The same may be said concerning a Temptation to the Commission of Sin. Our carnal Hearts will represent the Iniquity as very small, or as very pleasant, in order to induce us to comply with the Temptation; and when we are actually drawn away by our own Lufts and inticed, then Lust, having conceived, bringeth forth Sin, and Sin, being finished, bringeth forth Death. O the dreadful Tendency of excusing and alleviating Sin!

It is this sad Disposition in unrenewed Persons, that keeps them under the Dominion of their own Lufts: It is this prevents them from seeing the Danger of their State: It is this likewise that makes them continually careless, without an Interest in Christ's Grace and Righteousness; and deludes their Souls with many vain and dangerous Hopes.

The same Inclination, when it appears, and in any Measure prevails, in a gracious Person, is peculiarly provoking to God, and effectually robs him of all his Comforts and Spirituality, makes him grow more and more carnal, and so produces and promotes divine Withdrawments.

Let us all therefore beware of extenuating any Iniquity; and let us rather endeavour to aggravate it to ourselves, and before God. It is true, that to aggravate our own Sins is very disagreeable to Flesh and Blood, and often occasions a Diminution to our Pleasure. But yet it is a necessary Work; necessary to our true Humiliation, and necessary to keep us in the Love and under the Smiles of our gracious God. None have a stronger View of the Sinfulness of Sin, than those who walk closely and comfortably with God.

2. *Be watchful against the Devices of Satan, and the Deceitfulness of your own Hearts.* We cannot have a stronger Call to this necessary Duty, than what may be
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be deduced from the foregoing Discourse. For here we see, that the Devil and our own Hearts will use all possible Means to conceal from us the particular Sins that are the most detrimental and dangerous to our Souls. Are we afflicted in our Persons, or distressed in our Minds, and under the evident Marks of divine Displeasure? Satan and our corrupt Natures join to perplex us so, that we should not know wherefore it is that the Lord contends with us. Our perplexed Minds will now be for condemning us for every other Sin besides that which lies at the Bottom of our spiritual Distresses; and our Unbelief will attempt to drive us into Desperation, because of those Corruptions we see, lament, and pray against; while the Foundation of the Controversy between God and our Souls lies hid under a criminal Excuse. See here a most remarkable Evidence, that *the Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked.* See here the Necessity of a narrow Inspection, and of divine Illumination, in order to attain the Knowledge of our own Case, and of the Ground of our Complaints. *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into Temptation.* By a thorough Search, according to the foregoing Rules, joined with Prayer for divine Teachings, you may be led to see the Sin that most easily besets you, and that has gained the greatest Strength in your Souls.

3. Having found out the particular Sin or Sins which cause or continue the Distance between God and your Souls, now *endeavour to lay it to Heart as most abominable and detrimental.* The least Sin excused and alleviated by us becomes thereby a most grievous Abomination. Observe therefore how it has worked, and does work, in your Souls. Has it not polluted your Souls, weakened your Graces, taken away your spiritual Strength and Enjoyment? Does not this indulged or extenuated Sin, be
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be it what it will, destroy the Sincerity of your Confessions, and the Uprightness of your Prayers? Can you frankly acknowledge, or heartily pray against that Iniquity which your Hearts cleave to, and which they would fain countenance? Surely no. Again, consider how provoking it must be to a gracious God to find you harbouring his Enemy in your Bosom, to find you wishing that it may be spared or winked at. Surely you cannot wonder, if the Lord withdraws from you. He does it justly; you oblige him to it; and he never will, never honourably can, restore his Comforts to you, until you are brought to hate, confess and bewail it before him. O beg therefore that the divine Spirit would convince you of Sin, and shew you more and more the Sinfulness of that particular Iniquity and Indulgence that lies nearest your Heart, that you may see how abominable it is, as well as feel how detrimental it is!

4. *Bring the Iniquity to the Cross of Christ, to be crucified there.* Sin will live every where but under the Cross of Christ. You may see your Sin, may strive, watch and pray against it, and it will still prevail to maintain the Separation between God and you, until you are directed to exercise Faith in the Blood of Christ for the Forgiveness and Mortification of it. *They that are Christ's have crucified the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts,* Gal. v. 24.

But you will, it may be, ask, "What is it to bring Sin to Christ's Cross, and to crucify it there?" I answer, it contains the following Things:

1. *To behold the Sinfulness of Sin in the Death of Christ.* You may see much of the Evil of it by looking into the holy Law, and observing its polluting Effect upon your own Hearts; but such Sight of Sin, by themselves, will not subdue it. Look upon the Cross of Christ; behold him suffering, bleeding, dying, and under his Father's
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Withdrawment for Sin imputed to him: There you may look and wonder, look and mourn, look and raise your Indignation against Sin in the strongest Manner. This will be a most effectual Means of making you to be truly ashamed of it, and to mourn for it with a godly, an evangelical Sorrow.

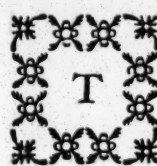
2. *To account every indulged Sin in you as crucifying the Son of God afresh.* By giving Way to Iniquity, by harbouring it in your Bosoms, or by casting a pleasing Glance upon the abominable Thing, you are guilty, not only of breaking the Law, but of undervaluing the Blood of the Covenant. What! Did *Christ* die for Sin, and shall you indulge it? Surely this would be doing what lies in your Power to bring him down, and nail him upon the Cross afresh. Oh! could we but have such Conceptions of Sin indulged, they would greatly tend to set our Hearts at the utmost Distance from it.

3. *It is to cast the Guilt of our Sin upon the Atonement of Christ, by Faith.* Do we now see ourselves verily guilty and filthy? Are we ashamed of ourselves, and enabled to abhor ourselves, because of our Abominations? Now surely we cannot but experimentally conceive, that nothing short of an infinite Atonement can procure Remission. Behold therefore the Atonement *Christ* has made; see how satisfactory it is to divine Justice, see how sufficient it is for our Pardon: And let us now endeavour to answer the Challenges of a guilty Conscience by the Blood of *Jesus Christ*. Thus we shall receive a divine Pardon to our Consciencs; thus we shall receive Peace and Reconciliation with God. And then we shall find him restoring Comforts to us, restoring the Joys of his Salvation, and the Quickenings of his free Spirit.

How unhappy is the Believer, while he lies under the Guilt of unpardoned Sin, and while the Corruption and Unbelief of his Heart keeps him back from a free Confession of it ! He has now lost all Enjoyment of himself, all Communion with God, and all special Pleasure in, or Profit by his Ordinances. He now sinks in deep Mire, where there is no standing ; he is now come into deep Waters, where the Floods overflow him. But when he is enabled to see his Sin, Guilt and Impurity, and to disburthen his Conscience by an Application to the Blood of *Christ*, O then his Soul is eased, his Heart purified, his spiritual Liberty restored, and a gracious God returns to him in Loving-kindness and tender Mercies.

C A S E XX.

How should we read the Word of God, so as may be for his Glory, and the Advantage of our Souls?

 HIS is a Question of no small Moment. It relates to a Duty incumbent upon all who are favoured with the Word of God: A Duty too much neglected by professing Christians, though so peculiarly calculated to promote our spiritual Advantage, and often made effectual for that Purpose. The Person who sent in the Question appears to be in some Perplexity how to discharge this Duty, so as to get some spiritual Profit. I will give you his own Words.

“ I am under some Uneasiness concerning the Word
 “ of God. I hope I love to hear it opened; to hear of
 “ that glorious Saviour exhibited therein, and that Satisfaction he has made to Justice; but, as to reading it,
 “ what Coldness do I find in that Duty? I sometimes
 “ appear to delight in the Duty; but if I try to meditate
 “ upon the Word read, how sadly do my Thoughts
 “ wander! So that it is but little that I understand of it.
 “ I know not what Method to take in reading; whether
 “ it would be most useful to begin at the Beginning, and
 “ so go regularly on. Besides, there is a great Part I
 “ know not the Meaning of. I have often heard of the
 “ glorious

“ glorious Promises there ; but when I meet with them,
 “ am afraid to take the Comfort of them, lest I should
 “ be deceiving myself with false Hopes. I have some-
 “ times, before I read the Word, put up a few Petitions,
 “ that I might read and meditate on it with Advantage :
 “ But, alas ! I have so carelessly attended to it, that I
 “ have thought at Times I had better omit these Pe-
 “ titions. In this Perplexity therefore I should be glad
 “ of your Directions, and of your Answer to the above
 “ Question.”

In this Case you find the Experience of many, and the Question given is of great Importance, and is worthy of our Consideration, as it may be useful, by a divine Blessing, both to our Direction and Quickening. As there are Numbers in this Gospel Land who *never* look into the Bible ; so many of those who read it, do it in such a Manner, as to receive *little or no Profit by it*. Some read it as a *Task* ; others in a *careless, customary Manner*, thinking they have done enough, if they have but gone through a *Chapter or two*, though they have *hurried* through it without Consideration, or read it when *half asleep*. If you thus read the Word of God, you cannot expect any great Advantage from it ; for when we trifle with God in Duties, we provoke him to withdraw his Spirit, and to withhold his Blessing.

The Directions I shall give for the profitable reading the Scriptures will be most particularly suitable to your Closet Retirements ; for I hope that you, who look upon *Prayer* as one Part, look upon *Reading* as another important Part of Closet Duty. Permit me therefore to suggest to you the following Directions.

I. *Read the Word with Prayer*. Prayer is one of the great Means of bringing down the divine Blessing upon
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all Ordinances and Duties to our spiritual Edification. It is a Means of *preparing* our Hearts for other Duties, and of enabling us to get Good from them. It would be well for Prayer to go *before Reading*. However, if Circumstances will not permit you to spend some Time in this Duty before you read the Word, do not *absolutely neglect it*; but send up a few Petitions to God, that he would *prepare your Heart* for the Work that lies before you; *open your Eyes*, that you may understand the Scriptures; and accompany Reading with a *divine Blessing*, that it may answer some valuable Purpose in your Soul, either to enlighten, quicken or comfort, or in some Way or other to promote your spiritual Good. When you consider these Things, you cannot but see the Propriety of *Prayer before Reading*. But especially *accompany Reading with Prayer*. Do not think you have done *all that is incumbent upon you*, when you have read the Scripture either in the Family or the Closet. Pray it over before God. Have you been reading any *Promises* of spiritual Blessings? Plead them with God. Has the Chapter been representing *the Odiousness of Sin*, its *dreadful Consequences*, the *Falls* of God's People, and the *Salvation* of the *chief of Sinners*? Beg that your Eyes may be opened to see the Malignity of Sin, the Wickedness of your Heart, and that you may be kept from those Evils, which many have fallen into, and be enabled to admire the Riches of free Grace in the Salvation of Creatures so unworthy, and in your own in particular. Have you been reading of the *Privileges* of God's Children here, and the *Glory* they shall have hereafter; or have you been taking a View of their *various Duties* in their respective Relations and Circumstances in Life, or of their *various Experiences*, and of the Dealings of God with them? Beg that your Heart may be suitably affected with such Representations,

that you may be encouraged in your Christian Course, quickened to run your Race, confirmed in your Belief of the Reality of Religion, and be enabled to continue, till you receive the End of your Faith, even your compleat and everlasting Salvation. Has the Chapter been representing the *Mediator*, his *glorious Person*, his *important Offices*, his *amazing Love*, the *Triumph of his Cross*, or his *Qualifications* for the great Work he has undertaken, and therefore his *All-sufficiency* to save? Be earnest with God, that you may be enabled to leave yourself with this *Jesus*, may be sprinkled with his Blood, have a Share in all the Blessings he has purchased, and that his Love may ever endear him to your Souls, kindle the sacred Fire in your Breasts, and engage you to walk before him in Holiness and Righteousness all the Days of your Life. Thus let Reading be *accompanied with Prayer*. Remember, the Scripture is full of important Mysteries, which we cannot see the Beauty of, unless the Spirit opens the Eyes of our Understandings. Our Hearts are naturally full of *Prejudices* against the glorious Contents of Scripture, and therefore we want the Spirit to remove these, and to give us a true Relish for the great Truths of Revelation, and impress them powerfully upon our Minds to our Salvation. They that neglect Prayer, and depend upon their *own Judgment and Skill* to guide them in Matters of everlasting Moment, have no Reason to expect the Spirit's Teachings, and are therefore liable to fall into every Error, even those that will prove eternally destructive to their highest Interest. Pray therefore for *divine Direction*, for *divine Quickenings*, that what you read may be a Means of bringing you nearer to God, and of promoting your everlasting Advantage.

Finally

Finally, Earnestly pray that whilst you are beholding the *Glory of the Lord in the Glass of his Word*, you may be changed into his Image, from *Glory to Glory*, and may find those Truths you are reading properly impressing, warming and establishing your Hearts, that you may be growing in the Image of your Redeemer, and be training up for a glorious and everlasting World above.

2. *Observe some Order in reading the Word, and make use of those Helps that may be necessary to your understanding it.* This Person is at a Loss to determine, whether he shall begin with the Bible, and so go regularly through it, or not. This seems to be the best Method to observe at your *stated Times* of Reading; and it will not prevent your looking into other Parts of Scripture, when you have Opportunity. This Method will give you a View of the great Events which the Scripture mentions, and of the various Circumstances of the Church from Period to Period, and of God's Dealings with them. By this Means you have a regular View of Things, as they appeared, from the Creation, down to Christ and his Apostles. You will hereby have a greater Insight into Scripture History and Chronology, which will be both entertaining and useful, and keep your Ideas of Things relating to Persons and Facts distinct and clear. This Person farther says, *there is a great Part of Scripture he does not understand.* You should read the Scripture therefore with an *Exposition* or *Paraphrase* *. This will open the Text

* It is an unspeakable Privilege that we have such a Variety of these both upon the Old and New Testament. Permit me to recommend *that excellent Paraphrase of Dr. Guise's upon the New Testament*, when you are reading that Part of Scripture, on account of its Clearness, Fullness, and yet Conciseness, as well as from the Experience I have had myself of its peculiar Usefulness.

to you, shew you the Connection, the Design, the Meaning, and so furnish you with Matter for serious Meditation. What End will it answer for you to read this sacred Volume, and not understand it? If it is a *sealed Book*, it is like to be *useless*.—Upon the whole, though you may understand some Parts, yet there are others, that will appear mysterious, and will remain so, to your great Disadvantage in Reading, unless you have some Interpreter to help you to understand their Meaning.

3. *You should be concerned to read the Word of God with great Seriousness and Attention, and a real Desire to have the Contents of it impressed upon your Mind, that you may be fitted more for glorifying God in every Character and Station.* If you run through a Chapter or two in a hasty, cursory Manner, you cannot expect much Advantage. You should be concerned to attend with the utmost Care and Diligence, as well as with the greatest Seriousness. A Sense of the *glorious Author*, and of the *Subject-Matter* of Scripture, should fill you with a peculiar Awe, and command a Reverence. It is the *Word of God*; it comes with a *Thus saith the Lord*, has his Image instamped upon it, and is his *Message to you* concerning Things of everlasting Moment. It is not designed to amuse us with trifling and empty Speculations, or divert us with romantick Stories; it contains Things of a far nobler and more sublime Nature, even Things that concern our everlasting Peace. It reveals the *Transactions of Eternity* concerning the Salvation of Man. It represents the *Fall*, with all its melancholy Consequences; our *State by Nature*, how wretched and deplorable! It sets forth the *Riches of divine Grace* in the appointing a Saviour, and in the Method taken to bring about our Redemption and Salvation. It shows

us the *Encouragements* we have to apply to the Redeemer for all saving Blessings, represents the *Nature, Variety* and *Excellency* of them, the *Happiness* of the Saints in Heaven, the *Triumphs* and *Solemnity* of the great Day, the *Sentence* that will be passed upon the Wicked, and the *awful Execution* of it in Hell. It is full of *Promises* on the one Hand, and *Threatenings* on the other, and therefore calls for the greatest Seriousness and Attention in those who read it. It is designed to be a Means of our *Sanctification*, and so to fit us for the heavenly World, and therefore we should seriously attend to it. And, lastly, it is *that Word* by which we must be judged. This is the grand Book that will be opened; according to this will the Sentence be passed, and all the Opportunities we have had of reading and hearing it, but not improved, will appear against us, if found Strangers to Jesus, and aggravate our Condemnation. How *seriously, reverently and attentively* then should we read this sacred Word! In fine, when we read the Scripture, it should be with Views and Desires of feeling its Power, and tasting its Sweetness; that our *Minds* may be more *enlightened* by it, and our *Souls* more *established*; that our *Corruptions* may be more *mortified*, and our *Graces* more *quicken-ed* and *strengthened*; that our *Doubts* may be more *re-moved*, and our *Souls* be *supported* under all the Difficulties of Life; that the *Promises* may be more and more our *Joy*, *Heaven* be more in our *Eye*, and we be set a longing more after the full and everlasting Enjoyment of God above.

4. *Reading the Word of God should be accompanied with Meditation and Self-examination.* Reading alone will be of little Service. Food taken into the Stomach will answer no valuable Purpose, unless it is digested. Meditation is a digesting spiritual Things, and turning them in-

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to Nourishment to our Souls. By this we extract Honey from every Truth, and so get some Additions made to our Knowledge and Experience. It is a Means of humbling, quickening and establishing our Souls, and of kindling a Fire in our Affections. Whilst the Psalmist was *musing the Fire burned*, Psalm xxxix. 3. How often, in Meditation upon what the Christian has been reading, has he found his Affections raised, and his Soul brought in some measure near to God? How often, whilst musing, has he been filled with an Indifference to this World, Hatred of Sin, Self-abhorrence, Love to the Lord Jesus Christ, Admiration of his rich and infinite Grace, warm Desires after the Enjoyments above, and satisfying Views of an Interest in them? By Meditation the Word takes *deeper Root* in us, makes a more powerful Impression on our Minds, and furnisheth us with *Matter* for Prayer. *As often as you read, be concerned to meditate upon it. — Examine yourself too by it, and see what Concern you have with it, what Influence it has had upon you, and how you may improve it.* Have you been reading any of the Marks and Characters of the People of God, the Graces of the Spirit? Inquire whether you have found any of them in your own Soul. Has the Chapter been representing some of the Doctrines of Christianity? Examine what Knowledge you have of them, how they suit your Experience, and what Use you may make of them for Humiliation, Encouragement, &c. Have you been reading of the Love of God in the various Parts of Redemption and Salvation by Christ Jesus? *Here's a Theme for your Meditation; here's a Call for Examination.* Inquire whether it has ever affected your Heart, raised your Admiration, and kindled a sacred Flame in your Soul. Finally, Compare your Heart with what you read; see whether it is not your Case that

that is represented, and endeavour by Meditation upon, and a Self-application of it, to get some spiritual Advantage from it. To these Directions I may add,

5. *Read the Word of God frequently.* The oftener you read the Scriptures, the more Benefit you are like to receive. Let the Bible be your Companion. Be much conversant with it. Consult it upon all Occasions. In every Difficulty; when you want Quickening, Direction, Comfort or Establishment, look into the sacred Word. Let it be your daily Practice to read it, as by this Means you will get a growing Acquaintance with it, its various Mysteries, the Duties it represents, the Encouragements and Directions it gives you in every Case; and so, by a divine Blessing, will have your Knowledge and Experience increased, your Graces confirmed and strengthened, and your Way made easy and pleasant through this difficult Wilderness. I shall now close with two Reflections.

1. *What Reason have we to be thankful for the Scriptures, and the free Use of them!* When we consider the divine Authority of this Book, view its important Discoveries, its peculiar Usefulness, and how many are deprived of it, we have Reason to admire infinite Grace that we enjoy it, and should ever esteem it as the choicest of our Treasures. We have great Reason to be thankful, that God is delivering us from Time to Time from Popery, as by this Means our sacred Privileges are continued to us, and we have the free Use of the Bible, have it in our own Houses, as well as in the House of God, and can examine it upon all Occasions, and try every Doctrine by this divine Standard. These must not be ranked *amongst the least of our Mercies*; they are of great Importance, and call for our highest and our united Praises.

2. *What*

2. *What Matter of Lamentation is it, that this sacred Book is so much neglected, and how inexcusable must such for ever be!* There are many Families, it is to be feared, in this Land, who have not so much as a Bible in their Houses; nor do they desire it. There are others who have it, but let it lie neglected, as an unfashionable Book. Romances, Plays, History, and various Sorts of human Compositions are in constant Use: But this most excellent Volume, this Book that is the Foundation of all our Knowledge of divine Things, our Holiness and our Comfort, is thrown aside; or when it is ever opened, it is with Reluctance. What amazing Ingratitude and Stupidity is this! Oh, may we all be humbled for our own and others Negligence, and be concerned in our respective Stations to esteem, use and improve the Scriptures ourselves, and do all we can to excite others to do the same; that we may see Peace and Righteousness again flourish, Ignorance and Superstition banished, and a Knowledge of the Gospel spreading throughout the Land. —*So, Lord, let it be. Amen, and Amen.*

CASE XXI.

How may a Christian attain to perform the Duty of serious Meditation in a right Manner?

This Question is grounded upon the following Letter.

S I R,

“ I Am by Profession a Follower of the blessed Re-
 “ deemer, and hope I can appeal to the Searcher of
 “ all Hearts, that it is my Desire to walk in all the Sta-
 “ tutes and Ordinances of the Lord blameless. Holy,
 “ ferious Meditation is, I am persuaded, a Duty which
 “ every Christian ought to exercise himself in. It is a
 “ Duty in which I once took great Pleasure and De-
 “ light: Not a Day was suffered to pass in the Neglect
 “ of it for a considerable Time. But, alas! to my
 “ Shame may I speak it, an alluring World, a tempting
 “ Devil, and a still viler Traitor within, conspired against
 “ the Welfare of my precious and immortal Soul. I be-
 “ gan to perform it in a slight, indifferent Manner, and
 “ at last was prevailed upon to neglect it. Now I feel
 “ the awful Effects thereof, in a dark Understanding, a
 “ hard Heart and cold Affections. I endeavour to set
 “ about the Duty; but, oh! the Spirit is withdrawn, I
 “ have lost my God; and I, whither shall I go? My
 “ Thoughts are immediately gone after some trifling Va-
 “ nity :

“ nity : I endeavour to rally them, but they are soon
 “ gone again : I command them in the Name of the
 “ Lord to attend, for I have a great Work to do ; but
 “ all is of no Avail.

“ I should be greatly obliged to you, Sir, if you
 “ would take my Case under your Notice, and give me
 “ some Directions at the Lecture concerning the right
 “ Performance of this so important a Duty.”



Shall aim at an Answer to the various Particulars contained in this serious Case, by laying down the following Propositions :

I. *There is a great Difference between speculative Study and spiritual Meditation.* This Observation is of the greatest Importance to direct us what we are to aim at, when we are striving to perform this Duty. Our Friend, in the Letter, seems to have a very clear Notion of the Nature of this Duty, and the Difference between it and mere Study, from his own Experience. But yet it is needful to say a few Words to make this Distinction clear ; for though there be in Appearance a near Affinity between Study and Meditation, yet in Reality they are as different from one another, as the Sun shining in the Heavens, and a Sign of the Sun painted. It is to be feared, that many Persons are apt to imagine, that Meditation is nothing else but thinking over, looking and inquiring into the Doctrines and Duties of the Word of God. But it is plain, a Person may employ himself much in this Way, and yet be a Stranger to true Meditation. The Difference lies here : Study is the looking into divine Things in order to understand them ; but Meditation is the ruminating upon them in order to apply them to our Cases and Consciences, and to raise our Affections towards spiritual Things. Study is, as I
 may

may say, the Thoughts of the *Head*, while Meditation consists in the Thoughts of the *Heart*. By Study concerning *God*, for Instance, a Person inquires into the Evidences for his Existence, and for a notional Acquaintance with his Perfections and Glories: But by Meditation he contemplates those Glories in order to affect his own Heart with them, and to see his own Concern in Relation to them. The same Difference may be observed between these two with regard to any of the Doctrines or Duties of Law or Gospel. If therefore you would attain to perform this Duty in a proper Manner, it is highly necessary you should know what it is when you set about it, and should keep up this important Distinction, lest you should cheat yourselves with bare speculative Study in the Room of holy Meditation.

2. *That the chief Part of the Experience of Religion is included and contained in a right Performance of this great Duty.* It is in holy Meditation that we feel all the Experiences of the spiritual Life, and exercise all the Graces of the Spirit. What is the Exercise of *Faith*, but realizing Thoughts upon divine and spiritual Truths? What is holy *Desire*, but a realizing View of the Desirableness of God in Covenant, so as to draw forth our Longings after him? What is the Exercise of the Grace of *Hope*, but serious Meditation upon the Promises and Blessings promised, with suitable Affection? Wherein consists the Exercise of the Grace of *Love*, but in endearing Thoughts and Views of God in Christ? And what is the Grace of *Humility*, but the having low and abasing Thoughts of ourselves? So that I may venture to affirm, that true Grace is no farther exercised by us, than as our Thoughts are employed by holy Meditation, in viewing and realizing spiritual Things in a spiritual, heart-affecting Manner. And this Duty of Meditation

tation is of such a Nature, that it is included in all other spiritual Duties, so far as they have any thing of the Exercise of Grace in them. For Instance: In *Prayer* we have no Exercise of Grace, but so far as our Souls take Notice of our own Wants, and of Christ's Grace and Fullness. In *Reading* we have no Exercise of Grace, any farther than as we understand, realize and apply to ourselves what we read. The same may be said concerning *singing* the divine Praises, *hearing* the divine Word, *confessing* our Sins, and the like. So far then as there is any thing of the Power of Religion in our Souls, so far the Thoughts of our very Hearts are engaged in and employed about the spiritual Things we are conversant with. And thus, when any Grace is exercised, there is some spiritual Meditation, let the Duty engaged in be what it will. But sometimes this Duty of holy Meditation is performed *alone* as a separate Duty; namely, when the Soul is enabled to look with a spiritual Eye, and in an affectionate, realizing Manner, upon the Things which are not seen, and are eternal; when we set ourselves designedly to think on spiritual Subjects, have Thoughts flowing in upon us, and have the Doctrines, Promises or Precepts of the Word brought to our Minds, and we receive them to ourselves, and apply them to our own Cases. But, whether Meditation be performed by itself, or in any other Duty, remember, that if it be rightly performed, it always includes in it the Exercise of Grace, and the Exercise of Grace always includes Meditation. From what has been said concerning this Duty, it immediately follows, that none but the lively Christian can daily perform it in a right Manner: And this seems to have been the happy Case of the Person who wrote this Letter.

3. *There is a Necessity for the special Operations of the Spirit of God, in order to a right spiritual Performance of this Duty.* Let us contemplate as well as we can upon what we read, hear, or know; yet unless we are favoured with the Presence and Influences of the divine Spirit, we shall find ourselves incapable of true Meditation. Without him all our Contemplations will be dry Study, speculative Thought, and laborious Attempt, without Success. But if the divine Spirit takes of the Things of Christ, and shews them to our Souls, then we can see them, then we can realize them, then we can feel them, and apply them to ourselves, and can think upon them with spiritual Affection. As a Proof of all this, I may appeal to the Experience of all God's People; and may say, as *Job* does in another Case, *If it be not so now, who will make me a Liar, or make my Speech nothing worth?*

4. *That the Holy Spirit is a gracious, just and sovereign Agent.* We must acknowledge that he is *sovereign*; for he, like the Wind, blows where he listeth, *John* iii. 8. But let us not forget, that he is likewise a *wise* and *just* Agent. He is, I say, a *just* Agent; for when he is quenched or grieved, he resents the Indignity, and justly withdraws. If therefore we grow negligent in any Duty, or give way to any Sin, we have Reason to expect that he will withdraw from us; and when he is gone, there is an End, as I may say, for the present, to all the right Performance of holy Meditation. Farther, it is plain that the Spirit acts as a *wise* Agent; he knows best when to favour us with his Influences, or when to suspend them.

5. *Though we have not the Influences of the Spirit at our Command, yet there are many Things that may be done by us, which may drive him away, and many Means may be*

made use of to obtain his gracious Return. As to the former of these, I need not tell you how to drive him away. This is what I hope you dread and detest as the forest Evil. But when he is withdrawn, the great Question is, What Means must be made use of for his Return, that thereby our Souls may be fitted for the spiritual Exercise of holy Meditation? This is what I apprehend our Friend desires particularly to know. He wants Direction for the right Performance of the Duty, now he finds he has lost his Capacity for it. But I hope he does not imagine, that any Directions can answer this End without the Spirit's Return. So that the first and chief Concern is not, *How I may set about this Work so as to attain the delightful Performance of it?* but, *What Method must I take to have the former Influences and Assistances of the Spirit restored to me?* For then, and not till then, will this Duty be rightly performed. Give me leave here to lay before you a few plain Directions as follow :

1. Is the Spirit withdrawn? Endeavour to maintain a Sensibility of his Absence. For it is a good Sign that he is not totally withdrawn, while there is left in our Souls a distressing, humbling Sense of his Absence. But if we grow careless and indifferent about his Presence and Influence, and now think to recover ourselves by Virtue of the Use of Means in our Power, we have missed the Way, and can never attain to what we want, until our Souls are led out after his gracious Influences.

2. Inquire into the particular Cause or Occasion of the Spirit's Withdrawment; and when you have found out the Sin or Sins which have occasioned it, then go and humbly confess them before God, loath yourselves for them, and bring them unto the Cross of Christ to be pardoned and crucified.

3. Never

3. Never omit spending some Time in secret, daily to converse with God, with his Word, and with your own Souls. Keep steady to Closet Religion, and endeavour to make the best of it. By no means neglect the Duty itself, under a Pretence that you cannot perform it aright without the Spirit. It is indeed very unpleasant and very discouraging, when we find, from Day to Day, that the Wheels of Devotion drive on heavily. But however unpleasant it be, yet you ought still to keep to it, in order to maintain a Sense of, and an humble Frame of Spirit under, divine Withdrawments. But if you should be prevailed upon to neglect these regular Exercises, you can have no Reason to expect, that the Life of Religion should be maintained, or the Comforts and Pleasures of it restored to your Souls.

4. Take Advantage from what you feel in yourselves to promote the Work of Meditation. Are you in a dark, declining and deserted Frame? It is true, you cannot at present meditate as you would upon the Glories of God in Christ with Sweetness and Delight; and all your Endeavours to realize and impress these glorious Subjects upon your Minds will be found abortive, while you remain in this declining Frame. But remember, that in this dark Season you are called upon to another Sort of Meditation; namely, to meditate upon the Sinfulness of Sin, the Deceitfulness of your own Hearts, the Corruption of your Natures, and the sad Effects produced by the Workings of Corruptions in you. And, if you can contemplate seriously upon these awful, humbling Subjects, this may be a happy Means of rendering Christ and his Grace the more precious and desirable to your Souls. Though in your present Frame you cannot find in your Hearts to dwell upon glorious and delightful Subjects; yet you may find Matter enough in your pre-

sent Condition to fill your Thoughts with Subjects of a self-abasing and penitential Nature. And when you are employed in this Sort of Meditation, turn it into Confession and humble Supplication.

5, and lastly, Do not think that the Duty of holy Meditation must be confined to itself, but bring in other spiritual Duties to its Assistance. It is not very often we can perform this Duty in a right Manner separated from other Duties. It is indeed a happy Thing, if a Person can regularly and daily form his Mind to it, and find his Frame fitted for it, whenever he sets about it designedly. But I believe that, generally speaking, this is a Privilege that is not very common. For when we apply our Minds to it professedly, and attempt to pursue a spiritual Subject in a Way of Contemplation, the Vanity of the Mind either prevents us from entering upon any regular Chain of Thought, or soon breaks in upon it; and when we are thus disappointed, the more we strive against the Stream, the more embarrassed and perplexed we shall be. It would be proper therefore to turn this Attempt for Meditation into mental Prayer, or else take the Word of God or some spiritual Author in hand, with a View to direct our Thoughts, and apply what is read to our own Case and Circumstance. And if we can have our Thoughts seriously employed, either in repeating any Portion of Scripture from our Memories, or in reading it, or in lifting up our Hearts to God in ejaculatory Prayer; this is as real Meditation, as if it were performed in a separate Duty. Upon the whole, if you are inclined to attend to such Rules as these, you may hope that, *e'er you are aware, your Souls will make you as the Chariots of a willing People,* Cant. vi. 12.

I shall

I shall conclude the whole with a few Remarks upon this experimental Case for the Benefit of all.

1. *How gradually does Sin make its Entry into our Souls !*
We perhaps at first only begin to perform a Duty in a slight Manner, then we proceed to an occasional Neglect of it, then to an almost total Neglect ; whereby the Door is set open for Sin and Satan to enter, and our Hearts grow more and more hard, our Thoughts more vain, and our Souls weak to withstand any Temptation, or engage in any Duty.

2. *How sad are the Consequences of grieving the Spirit !*
It must be acknowledged, that he is very often grieved by us : But, blessed be his Name, he does not always take the Advantage against us ; does not always resent the Affronts we cast upon his gracious or comforting Influences, by undervaluing or overvaluing them. If he did, the People of God would be perpetually in a deserted, uncomfortable Condition. But when he is once provoked to such a Degree as actually to withdraw, O what sad Effects follow ! Now the Graces of the Spirit seem to lie dead, now nothing but Sin and Corruption seem to reign, now we are exposed to fall a ready Prey to our spiritual Enemies, and we may be obliged to pray and wait a long time before there be any comfortable Return. Let us therefore be very cautious and watchful, lest we dishonour and offend him ; for when we begin to fall, we know not how low we may fall, or how dismal our Case may be, before he returns, and we are revived.

3. *How ungovernable are our Thoughts and Affections !*
It is evident to a Demonstration, that we have them not at our Command. They are like an Army of undisciplined and disaffected Soldiers. The Will is, as it were, the General of the Army ; he commands them to act, but they stir not ; he sees them running away, and com-

mands them to rally, but to no Purpose. To will is present with us, but to perform that which is good we find not. See how necessary it is that we should be under a superior Influence to that of our own Hearts.

4. *How ignorant are they of the Nature of true Religion, who think it at their Option to be pious, holy and spiritual at Pleasure!* They who think so, betray their Weakness, Ignorance and Unbelief. For, if the spiritual Christian, a Person that has tasted of divine Grace, finds his Corruptions so untameable, his Affections so irregular, and his Thoughts so ungovernable; how can it be, that Unbelievers should have any Strength so much as to think a truly good Thought?

Lastly, *What a plain Rule may we collect from this Subject to judge of the Progress or Declension of spiritual Grace in our Souls!* We may easily judge how Things go with us, only by observing how strong or how weak, how frequent or how seldom the Meditations of our Hearts are upon spiritual Subjects. The more advanced a Christian is in the spiritual Life, the more his Heart can dwell upon divine Subjects with Pleasure and Self-application, and the more natural it is to him really to meditate in the midst of the Duties both of Life and Religion. But if we from Day to Day find our Thoughts vain, our Meditations barren, our Hearts dry and unsuited to devout Contemplation; it is a Sign that Religion is at a low Ebb with us. Be therefore frequently asking yourselves such Questions as these: Whether the very Thoughts of your Hearts are employed upon divine Subjects? Whether you can truly meditate when you are *reading*, can meditate when you are *hearing*, can meditate when you are *praying*? And according to the Answer your Consciences give to these Questions, so you may determine concerning the Growth or Declension

clension of true Religion in your Souls. Happy are they, whose Thoughts and Hearts are daily taken up with spiritual Things; and how much happier still are they, who are advanced to Glory, where they are employed without Intermission, and without End, in nothing else but holy Contemplation upon heavenly Things in heavenly Places!



C A S E XXII.



When may a Christian be said to pursue the Affairs of the present Life, so as to prevent his Advances in Grace, dishonour God, and injure his Soul?



AS this Question appears to be of so critical and important a Nature, and will lead me to touch upon a darling Sin, a Sin too common amongst us, *viz. Love of this World*; so, to be properly upon my Guard, and to clear the Way for a direct Answer, I would first premise these two Things:

1. *That all Persons ought to be diligent in that Calling in which God in his Providence has placed them.* Diligence in the Shop is highly commendable. For want of this Persons have often gone backward in the World, have thereby lost all Opportunities of being useful, and have brought themselves into such Circumstances, as greatly reflect upon the amiable Character they bear as Christians. Poverty and Distress are the Consequences of Slothfulness. *Prov. xxiv. 30—34. I went by the Field of the Slothful, and by the Vineyard of the Man void of Understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with Thorns, and Nettles had covered the Face thereof, and the Stone-wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received Instruction: Yet a little Sleep, a little Slumber, a little Folding of the Hands*

to Sleep. It was a Command, which the Apostle under the Direction of the Spirit gave, that *if any Man would not work, neither should he eat*, 2 Thes. iii. 10. Industry is not only consistent with, but *highly becoming* the Christian. It is of peculiar Service to keep Persons from Temptations, both temporal and spiritual. A slothful Life is a *dangerous* Life. Satan has greater Opportunities of laying his Schemes with Advantage. Whilst our Hands are employed, our Head is amused, and the Enemy cannot so easily distress us. I hope none will take Occasion, from any Thing I may say in my Solution of this Question, to intimate that I discourage Diligence. I would rather *press it*. The Children of God, though interested in his peculiar Favour, and Heirs of Glory, yet are not exempted from Labour, even with regard to the present World. If they will have Bread and other of the Comforts of Life, they must get them by the *Sweat of their Brows*.—Yet,

2. *The Enjoyments of this World, through the Depravity of our Hearts, are greatly ensnaring, and often prove greatly injurious to the Christian.*—They are Blessings in themselves, and call for Thankfulness; but through the Sinfulness of our Nature become Temptations to us, often take away our Affections from God, give us a Coolness to spiritual Duties, and endanger at least the eternal Destruction of our Souls. This is the Reason, why our Lord in such strong Terms represents the great Difficulty of a rich Man's Salvation: Matt. xix. 24. *It is easier for a Camel to go through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God.* And this is the Reason that the Apostle tells Timothy to charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, 1 Tim. vi. 17. No wonder then, that

Agur

Agur made such a wise Choice, and begged that God would give him *neither Poverty nor Riches, but would feed him with Food convenient for him*, Prov. xxx. 1. I mention this Remark, to shew how much Persons ought to be upon their Guard in their Pursuits of this World. The first Observation shews the Necessity of Diligence, this tends to keep Diligence from degenerating into an immoderate Thirst after outward Enjoyments. —I now then come to the Question itself: *When a Christian may be said to pursue the Affairs of the present Life, so as to prevent his Advances in Grace, dishonour God, and injure his Soul?* It is a difficult Matter to steer between two Extremes. We are either ready to be too negligent on the one hand, or too anxious and eager on the other. The Christian may often encrease in worldly Wealth, but God sends *Leanness into his Soul*. When we act unsuitably to our Character, we grieve the holy Spirit, and he in a measure departs from us, and leaves us to ourselves.—But, the Christian may be said to pursue the World, so as to dishonour God, prevent his Growth in Grace, and injure his Soul,

I. *When it breaks in upon his Opportunities of attending to spiritual Duties.* It is not enough that we spend one Day in seven in attending to the Concerns of our Souls. The Christian must not let the *Week* slip away, even if his worldly Engagements are never so great, without conversing with God and his own Heart; if he does, it is a sad Sign of his being in *languishing Circumstances*. Spiritual Meditation, Self-examination, Prayer, religious Conversation, and Reading the Scriptures are all Duties of great Importance; Duties in the Performance of which the Christian Life is maintained, Corruptions are subdued, Graces are strengthened, and he is enabled to make some Progress in his Way to *Zion*. I say not
how

how often a Person must pray, read, hear, &c. that he may grow in Grace. But when we find our worldly Engagements breaking in upon our spiritual Duties, and gradually curtailing our Opportunities of attending to them, we should take the Alarm. We have many Enemies to encounter with in our Christian Warfare. We have but little Strength. We had need be much upon our Guard, be much in Prayer, and in the Use of those Means, which are necessary to our spiritual Prosperity. When the World therefore *encroaches upon our Time*, so as to leave but little for these Duties, we have Reason to be afraid of a *Decline*. Many have begun well, have set out with attending to the Duties of the Family and the Closet; but the World, encreasing upon them, has taken up their Time; they have left off all Family Prayer, and are, I fear, too little in the Duties of Retirement, and plead for an Excuse, *they have no Time*. They content themselves herein by a Persuasion that the Work was begun some Time since, and therefore they are safe, though they cannot so well attend to all the Duties they once did. Whether these Persons are Christians or not, I dare not determine; but I apprehend we may without Hesitation conclude, *that they are not growing Christians*. They bring no Honour to Religion. They who give up such Opportunities as these for the World, reflect thereby upon the Concerns of the Soul, as of a trifling Nature, and far inferior to outward Enjoyments: And I need not say how much this grieves the Spirit, and brings a Consumption upon the New Man. But if, whilst you are pursuing the World, you will reserve Time for Family and Closet Religion, for looking into your Hearts, and attending the Means of spiritual Improvement, *you may be growing as to both Worlds*.—

II. *The Christian may be said to pursue the Things of the World to the Dishonour of God, and Injury of his Soul, when he finds thereby a growing Coldness and Indifference to spiritual Duties, and his Thoughts are much taken off from God.* It is an unspeakable Happiness, when, amidst the Engagements of this Life, we find a Readiness to Duty, and a Delight in it; when we can rejoice that the Sabbath is just at hand, and find that the Enjoyments of the World do not give us an Indifference to the great Duties of it; when we find a holy Warmth upon our Spirits, a Readiness to spiritual Conversation, serious Meditation, and a Pleasure in Closet Duties. It is happy, when the Christian is enabled to keep the World at a proper Distance, to look upon it as it is, Emptiness and Vanity, and cheerfully endeavour to abstract his Thoughts from it, and attend, when God gives him an Opportunity, to those Things that relate to his immortal Part. It is happy, when, like the good Man whom *David* describes, he often employs his Thoughts in sweet and spiritual Meditation; when he labours to have his Soul above, whilst his Hands are employed; or to be in an habitual spiritual Frame, to rise up to God often in holy Thoughts, Desires and Affections. *This is the Person who makes Advances in the divine Life*, even whilst he is busily engaged in his secular Concerns, and pursuing them with all becoming Diligence. But, if we find the World chilling our Hearts, producing a Barrenness in our Frames, and a Coldness to Duty: If we can let slip Opportunities of attending to our Souls, making an Excuse to God and our Consciences, *that we are busy*, (though it really flows from that Indifference the World has given us to spiritual Exercises :) If we find a growing Fondness for present Things, and as that Fondness encreases, our Relish for the spiritual Parts of Religion lessens:

lessens: If we can pursue the World with a particular Gust, Eagerness, and Delight; but, when we come to enter upon Duties, we find a *sad Deadness* and *Reluctance* to them: If we find a growing Indifference to spiritual Conversation, but a Pleasure in that which is worldly and trifling, we may conclude that we are pursuing the World, *so as to dishonour God*, and that, whilst our outward Circumstances may be flourishing, *our Souls are in a lean and starving Condition*. Always suspect Danger, when you find your Warmth in and Relish for spiritual Duties upon the Decline, when your Heart is willing to make frequent Excuses for the Omission of them; conclude that you have been *overacting your Part*, and *too eagerly pursuing present Enjoyments*.

III. *The Christian goes beyond his Duty in the Pursuit of this World, when his Inclination of improving the Mercies God has given him, is in some Measure taken away, and he grows into a worldly, covetous Temper.* The World is not given us for ourselves only, but to improve, to lay out for the Glory of God, and the Good of others. Christ has left his Poor with us as a Legacy: We are to take care of them, to nourish and support them. We are to feed the Hungry, cloath the Naked, and supply the Necessitous. We are to support the Gospel, and in a Variety of Instances use what we have to promote the Interest of our Redeemer. If then you are seeking after the World, and are diligent in your respective Callings, that not only you and your Families may have a comfortable Subsistence, but that you may have Opportunities of doing Good to others, by supplying the Indigent, and showing Regard for the Gospel; if you are concerned to *set apart a Portion* of what God is giving you for his Cause, and to improve as his Providence calls, and you find this Temper
of

of Mind *encreases* with your Wealth, then you have reason to conclude that your Enjoyments come with a *Blessing*; you walk in a great Measure *suitably* to your Character, and may be making *Improvements* in the divine Life. But if, as the World *encreases*, you lose your Desire of Usefulness; if you find your Concern for promoting the Glory of God and the Good of others is lessened; if what little you give, you give grudgingly; if you find an *encreasing* Fondness for the World, and a growing Desire after Riches; if you are willing to grasp at all you can, and cloak your Covetousness under the Names of Prudence and Frugality; if, upon the whole, you become more selfish, and your Views and Desires are more contracted, you have Reason to conclude, that you are pursuing the World with *too much Eagerness*, that you have *suffered some Loss* as to your Souls, walk *unsuitably* to your Character, and bring but *little Honour to God*. To put a Brand upon Covetousness, and to shew its dangerous and destructive Tendency, it is called *Idolatry*, Col. iii. 5. The nearer we approach to it therefore, the *farther we go from God*.

IV. *The Christian dishonours God, and hurts his own Soul, when his pursuing the World produces a proud, carnal Frame, or too great Anxiety and Distrust.* This has been too often the Case. When Christians have succeeded as to this World, they have grown *proud*. Paul tells Timothy (as we observed before) to *charge rich Men, that they should not be high-minded*, 1 Tim. v. 17. And Agur was afraid lest *Riches* should make him *deny God*, Prov. xxx. 8. *When Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked*, Deut. xxxii. 15. Christians, thro' a Flow of Prosperity, have too much forgotten God, become carnal and trifling in their Frames and Conversation, have been too much carried away

away with the Thoughts of their Enjoyments, aimed at a Superiority over others, looking upon them with an Air of Haughtiness, or treating them as if they were not made of the same Materials ; as if they were not Children of the *same Family*, interested in the *same God*, and equally precious to the *same Redeemer*. Carefully avoid such a Frame as this. It provokes God to *withdraw his Spirit* in a Measure, the Consequence of which is a sad Decline in the Power of Religion. *He that trusteth in his Riches shall fall*, Prov. xi. 28. Always be afraid that you are going backward, when your Enjoyments *lift you up*, and bring you into a *careless Spirit*.—Again, If your Pursuits of the World are accompanied *with Anxiety*, *suspect some Danger*. Some Persons are so eager after the World, or put such a Value upon it, that they are ever fretful and uneasy, if they meet with the least Disappointment. They pursue present Things with the utmost Sollicitude, are afraid lest their Schemes should not be properly executed, are ever doubting of Success, and discontented if every Circumstance does not appear suitably to their Inclinations, or if others prosper more than they. Now what does all this signify, but a too great Dependence upon the World, a valuing it too highly, as if all our Happiness consisted in the Enjoyment of it? And what a Reflection this upon God, his Providence and Ways? What a grieving the Spirit? What a sinking the Concerns of the Soul? How unsuitable to the Christian Character, and to all those who have Heaven in Prospect? — Thus I have endeavoured to answer the Question in a few Particulars, and shall now close with some suitable Reflections.

I. *How awful is their State, who have this World as their Portion! It is absolutely incapable of giving compleat*
Happi-

Happiness. All its Enjoyments are empty and unsatisfying, and are by no means suitable to the Desires of a Soul. How many have been miserable in the midst of all their Affluence? A Circumstance in Providence robs them of all their Peace, and, like *Haman*, they cannot be happy whilst there is a *Mordecai* sitting at the Gate. — All the World will leave them at Death. The Term of Life is as long as they possibly can hold their Enjoyments: Then, however unwilling, they must take their everlasting Farewell, and oftentimes when they have the highest Relish of them, and Delight in them; they must leave all behind, and make an awful Exchange of Worlds. Lo, this is the Man that made not God his Strength, but trusted in the Abundance of his Riches, and strengthened himself in his Wickedness, Psalm lii. 7. He is not happy in Life; he is far from being so in Death. He leaves all, and lies down in everlasting Sorrow; all that he enjoyed not being able to secure him from the Terrors of the second Death, or give him the least Degree of Ease; but in Hell he lifts up his Eyes, being in great Torments, Luke xvi. 23. Lord, deliver us from such a Condition!

2. How much should each be concerned to examine himself with regard to his Pursuits of the World. If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him, 1 John ii. 15. The Covetous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 10. This should put us upon a strict Inquiry, whether we fall under this Character or not. — We should inquire, whether we do not dishonour God, and injure our Souls, by a too diligent Pursuit of inferior Comforts? — Does the World take up all my Time? Can I easily omit Duties, the Duties of the Family, or of the Closet? Do I find a growing Coldness to spiritual Duties? What is my End in pursuing the World, to gratify

tify an unbounded Ambition of Honour, Wealth or Pleasure; or is it to improve every Mercy, and employ every Talent, for the Glory of God? With what Frame do I pursue the World? What Impression, what Influence, has it upon me? — God knows how it is with you; I must leave it to your Consciences to answer.

3. *What Matter of Lamentation is it, that there are so many professing Christianity, who are of so worldly a Temper!* Does it not call for a Tear, when we see so much of a covetous, proud, carnal, trifling Spirit amongst those who call themselves Christians? Alas, alas! how much Time in the World, how little with God! What Eagerness in worldly, but what Coldness in spiritual Pursuits? How chearfully are Opportunities embraced for the World, but how are they omitted for God! How does the World lift us up! What Readiness to lay out any thing upon self, how backward to use it for the Good of others! What Self-love amongst Christians! Is it not so? Canst thou stand the Test, Christian? Is not thy Heart too much divided? Art thou not too greedy of earthly Gain? Dost thou not trust too much in thy Riches? Where is thy Love to God, thy Zeal for his Glory? Oh, be ashamed, ye Professors of Religion, be ashamed for your Earthliness, your Coldness, your Carnality and Unprofitableness.

4. *Let us all then be upon our Guard, and pursue the World so as that we may honour God, and grow in Grace.* Consider, amidst your Pursuits of present Things, that they are all *transitory* and *uncertain*, Luke xii. 16—21.—Consider, and walk under the View of *that Day*, when you must give an Account of your *Improvement of Time*, with all your *Enjoyments*. — Consider the *Obligations* Christ has laid you under to him, and what a *short Time*

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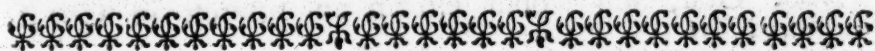
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you have to do any thing for him or his People. — Consider how much *more excellent* spiritual Enjoyments are than temporal. — And may the Lord enable us all to keep a Watch over our Hearts, and to use this World so as not to abuse it, knowing that the Fashion of all Things is passing away.

CASE



C A S E XXIII.



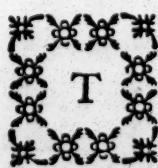
How may a Professor, who fears lest his Experiences are counterfeit and not genuine Graces, come to such a Satisfaction concerning his State, as shall encourage his continued Reception of the Lord's Supper?

This Question, which so much regards all Members of Gospel Churches, is taken into Consideration upon Account of the following Letter.

“ *Reverend Sir,*

“ I AM a young Person, who have had a religious
 “ Education, and have had Hopes that it was not
 “ entirely in vain; though I desire to be ashamed,
 “ that I have improved it no better. I should be very
 “ much obliged to you, if you would form a Question,
 “ and answer it, as soon as possible, from the follow-
 “ ing broken Account of myself. I was under Convic-
 “ tions, when I was very young; but they were too often
 “ stifled by me. But since that I have returned, and
 “ did believe God had begun a good Work on my
 “ Soul. I then thought it my Duty to give myself
 “ up to the Lord in a publick Manner, was received
 “ into a Church of Christ, have often found Pleasure
 “ in attending upon those Ordinances, and in particular
 “ have found Comfort at the Lord's Table. Though

“ it has not been always the same with me when there,
 “ yet I have hoped, that when the Ordinance was not so
 “ comfortable, it was a humbling one. I am often in
 “ Darkneſs about my State, and am ready to fear leſt
 “ I ſhould have deceived myſelf; but deſire ſtill to
 “ ſeek God, and would eſteem an Intereſt in Chriſt
 “ above all the periſhing Riches of this vain World,
 “ nay, above ten thouſand Worlds. But, Sir, I know
 “ not what to think of myſelf after all. If there is
 “ a falſe Faith, a falſe Love, a falſe Hope, a falſe
 “ Humility, and the like, perhaps mine may be no better.
 “ Is it my Duty to go to the Table of the Lord, if I
 “ have no real Love to him, and no true Faith in him?
 “ Is not this an Ordinance of Love? And when we
 “ attend upon it, is not this a Time to put Faith in
 “ Chriſt in Exerciſe? But if my Faith and Love are
 “ falſe, what muſt I do? Am I not deceiving myſelf
 “ and others, and mocking God? Surely none ought
 “ to go to this Ordinance, who have not a Change
 “ wrought in them; and if there be a falſe Pleaſure in
 “ ſuch an Ordinance, as well as a falſe Faith, how
 “ can I know that mine is not ſo? I fear I lean
 “ too much to outward Duties. I ſhould eſteem it a
 “ Favour, if you would, Sir, ſhew me what is a true
 “ Faith, true Love, &c. and what is the Difference
 “ between them and falſe Experiences, that I may
 “ know in ſome Meaſure how it is with me. If I
 “ belong to Chriſt I deſire to honour him both living
 “ and dying.”



HIS Letter plainly expreſſes the doubtful State
 of many a ſerious Chriſtian, that has had the
 Enjoyment of Goſpel Ordinances for a con-
 ſiderable Time, and has been admitted
 into the peculiar Privileges of Church-Fellowſhip.

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For I doubt not but that there is many a Person whose Heart reasons just after this Manner : “ I hope I have
“ received the Grace of God in Truth, and do now
“ make a publick Profession of it : But oh ! when I
“ hear even that Professors may deceive themselves with
“ false instead of true Hopes, with a false instead of a true
“ Love, I am afraid of myself, lest all my Experiences
“ should have been of this Kind. And since there is
“ so much Perplexity in my Case, so much Deceitfulness
“ in my Heart, and so much Confusion in my Mind
“ concerning myself, how shall I come to know whether
“ it is my Duty to go on receiving the Lord’s
“ Supper, as usual ? I am afraid all is not right between
“ God and my Soul : And if, after all, it should appear
“ that my Faith is a false Faith, my Hope a false Hope,
“ my Humility a false Humility, and the like, it is plain
“ I have no Right to partake of the Lord’s Supper.
“ Though indeed I have a visible Right to the Ordinance
“ by Reason of my Profession and Church Membership,
“ yet I am afraid I have no real spiritual Right to
“ it. Had I not then better suspend an Attendance upon
“ the Lord at his Table, lest I should go on deceiving
“ myself and others, until I can gain a clearer Satisfaction
“ concerning my State ? And if I should thus
“ withhold for a Time, how shall I arrive at this desired
“ Satisfaction, or how shall I attain to a well-grounded
“ Persuasion that my Experiences are true and genuine
“ Graces, not spurious and counterfeit ? ”

In this Way of reasoning, many a conscientious Professor and serious Christian often perplexes himself about his present Duty ; while the mere nominal Christian, the hypocritical Professor, has generally no Doubts upon this Head, but goes on in the outward Participation of Gospel Privileges, to the deceiving of

others, and the hardening his own Heart more and more. May the Lord enable me to speak to this important Point with Faithfulness and Clearness; and may the blessed Spirit set it home upon each of our Hearts for our Humiliation or Consolation.

In order therefore to answer this Question, I must desire all, who make a visible Profession, to look closely into these four Things: 1. Look into your Conduct and Practice. 2. Into the Nature and Ground of your Doubts and Jealousies. 3. Into the Frame and Temper of your Mind with respect to the Lord's Supper. And, 4. Into the Tendency of those Experiences you feel in yourselves.

1. Look attentively *into your Conduct and Practice*. For we must take that as a general Rule in all Cases, which the Apostle lays down, 1 John i. 6, 7. *If we say we have Fellowship with him, and walk in Darkness, we lye, and do not the Truth. But if we walk in the Light, as he is in the Light, we have Fellowship one with another; and the Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all Sin.* Be careful therefore to put these two Suppositions faithfully to yourselves. If you *walk in Darkness*, that is, if you go on knowingly and willingly in the Path of Sin, or in the Omission of known incumbent Duty, you may take it for granted, that all your Pretences are vain, that your Profession is Hypocrisy; and though you are Church Members, and so have a *visible* Right to all the Ordinances of the Church, yet you are Strangers to Christ, his Truth and Spirit. Your allowed Practice of any known Sin, whether secret or open, gives your Profession the Lye; or, as the Apostle strongly expresses it, *you lye, and do not the Truth.* But if, on the contrary, it is your real Desire to walk in all the Statutes and Ordinances of the Lord blameless; if you desire to be found
in

in the Way of your Duty, to watch, strive and pray against Sin; if you are sincerely desirous to honour and serve the Lord from a Principle of Love to him, and from a Sense of his Love to you; then you have real spiritual Fellowship with one another, and with the Church of God; and will happily find, that the Blood of Jesus Christ, represented in the Sacrament, cleanses you more and more from all Sin. I hope this is the Case with the young Person who wrote this Letter; for there are many Things in it, that seem to prove the Sincerity of his Profession; such as these: He desires to seek God; esteems an Interest in Christ above all the perishing Riches of this vain World, nay, above ten thousand Worlds; is afraid that he leans too much to his own outward Duties, and has a Desire to honour Christ both living and dying. Surely this is not the Language of an unregenerate Heart. Thus then let all Professors inquire into their Conduct and Practice.

2. Inquire into *the Nature and Ground of these Doubts and Jealousies*. You say you are often in Darkness about your State, and are ready to fear that you have been all along deceiving yourself: And understanding that there are such Things as false Experiences, false Faith, false Hope, false Humility, false Delight, and the like, your Suspicions are strengthened, and your Heart is discouraged. Now, I say, ask yourselves what is the Reason of these Doubts and Suspicions? I know that Satan and an unbelieving Heart will unite to cast a Damp upon the Mind, and inject a Surmise with special Strength and Weight. But perhaps it is only a Surmise that is injected, which does not offer any particular Reason for its Support. Now if these Injections and Surmises offer nothing to ground themselves upon, they are not to be attended to, but to be resisted and rejected. You are in

this Case to take the Shield of Faith, in order to quench these fiery Darts of the Wicked One. Whensoever such Jealousies seize your Mind, ask that Question seriously, which the Psalmist put to himself, *Psalm xlii. 5. Why art thou cast down, O my Soul; and why art thou disquieted within me?* Do not hearken to the Suggestion, unless it gives some sufficient Reason for its Support.

But if your Mind offers any Reason for these Doubts and Fears, then look attentively into them. Perhaps you will say, "Oh, I see much Reason to doubt; for I feel much Corruption in my Heart, much Deadness and carnal Security, much Vanity and Selfishness, and every Abomination in me, while I experience but little of Love to God, or Faith in his Son." And are such Things as these the true Reasons of your Fears? You have then great Ground to hope, that all is well with you. For this is an Intimation, that the Lord has enlightened you into the Knowledge of yourself; has given you a View of the Plague of your own Heart, and does not suffer you to be contented under the Prevalency of any Corruption. This Sort of Doubt is so far from rendering your Experiences the more suspicious, that it rather proves all you feel, that is like Faith, Hope and Love, to be true and genuine: For this Jealousy proceeds upon a spiritual Sight and Conviction of your own Unworthiness, Guilt and Corruption.

Again, Look into the *Tendency* of these Suspicions. Which Way do they work? Do they not tend to make you more humble and watchful; and, while you thus walk in the Dark, do you not therefore walk the more slowly and cautiously? Do they not make you more desirous after true Grace and greater Enlargement in Duty? Do they not make you long more for Holiness? If they work this Way, you have great Reason to conclude,
from

from the very Nature of your Suspicions, that your Hearts are right with God, and principled with his saving Grace.

3. Inquire into the *Frame and Temper of your Spirit with regard to the Lord's Supper*. Why do you desire a continued Enjoyment of this Privilege? What is it makes you want to have free Access to this Ordinance? Is it to subserve some temporal Interest? Is it to make a justifying Righteousness of this Privilege? Or is it that you may be the better esteemed among Christians or Professors? If it be, then you have sad Reason to fear, that you have no real Right to the Ordinance.

But do you desire the continued Enjoyment of this Privilege, to testify your Love to Christ, to have your Sins subdued, to have your Graces strengthened, your Affections for Christ inflamed, and to have some sweet Enjoyment of him along with the Saints of God? In a word, Are your Views and Desires conformable to the Design of Christ, in appointing this spiritual Ordinance? If they are, how dark soever your Frame may be, how dubious soever you may be as to your State, or how much soever you complain under the Power of Corruption, you may come and welcome to the Lord's Table; since your Designs and Desires in coming are to behold that which Christ therein exhibits, and to receive what Christ has to bestow. This Ordinance was particularly designed to comfort and establish such as are worried by the Temptations of Satan, and oppressed by their tyrannizing Corruptions.

As therefore you have a *visible* Right by being a Church Member, and being under no Church Censure, you ought to account that you have a *real* Right to it; because the Lord draws forth your Desires, and directs your Views to that, which is the very Design of this sacred

cred Institution. Come then, and welcome : Continue your Attendance ; for you are welcomed to the Table by Christ himself, as well as by his Church.

Lastly, Inquire into *the Tendency of those Experiences you feel in yourselves.* In looking over the Particulars of the Letter which occasioned this Question, I find there are five fundamental Graces of the Spirit mentioned ; concerning all of which, our Friend desires to know how he shall be satisfied, that they are true and genuine, namely, *Faith, Hope, Love, Humility and spiritual Pleasure.* It is true, there is a Counterfeit to each of these in the Hearts and Experiences of temporary Believers, and mere Notionalists. But, if you would know whether yours are true or false, look into the Tendency and Working of them in your Hearts. It would require much Time and several Discourses to enter deeply into the Consideration of each of these Graces, and to set forth the Evidences and Marks of their being either spurious or genuine. But I shall endeavour to run through them in as brief a Manner as I can, suggesting a few Thoughts that may give some Satisfaction concerning the Truth of each of them.

1. Look into your *Faith.* You sometimes feel Motions in your Heart, that have the Appearance of Faith in, and Reliance upon, the Lord Jesus. But, as there is a false Faith, you are afraid yours may be such. Consider then, and ask yourselves such Questions as these : Whether your Faith is only notional, or whether it be joined with a serious Concern for yourselves, about an Interest in Christ and his Salvation ? Again, Inquire whether you go to Christ for Sanctification, as well as Justification ? Inquire likewise whether the Reason of your Application to Christ be an inward Conviction of your own Guilt, Corruption and Helplessness ; or whether it be

be only a flighty Affection, without any serious Insight into yourselves? Now you may be sure, that if your Souls act towards Christ from a serious Concern for Holiness as well as Happiness, proceeding upon an inward Knowledge of yourselves, and founded upon the free Encouragement of the Gospel, you may be sure your Faith is true and genuine.

2. As to your *Hope*. You have at Seasons some pleasing Hope in your Souls concerning an Interest in Christ, and the Possession of his Salvation. You not only fly to Christ, but you have received some Hope into your Souls, that he will save you with an everlasting Salvation. Take notice then what is the *Foundation* and what is the *Tendency* of this Hope.

Observe what is the *Foundation* of this Hope. If it be grounded upon an Imagination of the Excellency of your Duties, and the Goodness of your Heart, it is a Hope that will make ashamed; because it betrays your Ignorance of your own Imperfections and Corruptions. But if it be founded upon the Freeness of divine Grace, the Riches of divine Love, and the Faithfulness of the divine Promises, it will stand the Trial, because it proceeds from *the Love of God shed abroad in your Hearts by the Holy Spirit*, Rom. v. 5.

Again, Look into the *Tendency* of your Hope. If it tends to make you careless under the Power of Sin, or more careless about walking with God, because you have a Prospect of being happy for ever, this is all wrong; such a Hope is certainly spurious and presumptuous. But if, on the contrary, it is your Heart's Desire to glorify God, to fly from Sin, and to increase in Holiness, the more your Hopes grow, this is a Token your Hope is genuine: For he that has a Gospel Hope in him, *purifies himself, even as Christ is pure*, 1 John iii. 2.

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3. As to your *Love*. You feel some Outgoings of Affection to Christ, to his Ordinances, to his People; but you fear lest all this may be counterfeit; and so it is, if this your Love is consistent with the Love and Liking of Sin: But if your Affection for Christ teaches you to cleave unto the Lord, to delight in his Ordinances, to love his People upon Account of their being such, and if it makes you the more willing and desirous to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ, it is surely a genuine Love.

4. As to your *Pleasure and Delight* in spiritual Things. You sometimes feel a Delight in divine Ordinances, a secret Pleasure in attending upon the Means of Grace, because they are sweet and comfortable to your Souls; but fear lest this likewise should be false. Indeed we must acknowledge, that even a Hypocrite may have a Pleasure in enjoying the Means of Grace, as we are told *Isaiah* lviii. 2. There it is said, concerning the hypocritical *Israelites*, that *they sought God daily, delighted to know his Ways, and even delighted in approaching to God*. But what was the Reason and Ground of their Delight? It was because they hoped by such Services to make Atonement for their Sins, and bring themselves into the divine Favour by their own Duties, as appears Verse 3. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our Souls, and thou takest no Knowledge?* They had such an high Opinion of their Duties, that they thought it strange God did not smile upon and reward them for their religious Services. But now ask yourselves this Question, What is the Reason of your Delight in divine Ordinances? Is it from a Hope of being justified thereby, or of laying God under some Obligation to you? Do you take Pleasure in them merely because they are suited to your own Sentiments, or because they convey a Pleasure to your Ears? Then indeed it
may

may be counterfeit. But if your Pleasure in approaching to God is, because you desire and hope to find him in his Ordinances, because you would receive Supplies from him, and enjoy Communion with him, and would be brought nearer to him, and be made more like him, you may then be sure that your Pleasure and Delight is genuine.

Lastly, As to your *Humility*. You find something within you that looks like a proper Humiliation before God and his People ; but your Fear is, lest this likewise should be spurious and counterfeit. To be satisfied as to this Matter, seriously inquire into the Nature of your Humility, whether it be feigned or forced, or whether it arises from a real Sight and Conviction of your own Meanness, Guilt and Pollution, as before God. There is a Kind of voluntary Humility, which some are very fond of ; striving to represent themselves before their Fellow-Christians as very contemptible and polluted, as very ignorant and weak, professing themselves to be such before Men, when they know in their own Consciences they would not chuse their Companions should have that Opinion of them ; but they do it on purpose that their Friends may think them very modest and self-abased. It is evident at first Thought, that this Humility has a most hateful Pride at the Bottom of it ; and those that are given to it, and fond of it, have great Reason to suspect themselves ; as they would certainly be suspected by their Friends, could they see through the Disguise.

But true Humility is an unfeigned, unforced Thing ; the Person that has it is really low in his own Eyes ; he sees and laments before God his own Guilt, Weakness and Impurity ; he confesses himself, in the Sight of God, as the chief of Sinners ; and the more he sees of the Grace of God in Christ, the more he admires at it, is
affected

affected with it, yea, and humbled by it. None are more humble in Reality than those, who can view and receive the Grace of the Gospel as entirely free. The truly humble Person, the more he sees of the divine Glory, and the more he beholds the Riches of Grace, the more he lays himself low at the divine Footstool. He says with *Job*, Chap. xlii. 5, 6. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the Ear, but now mine Eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in Dust and Ashes.* This is that broken Spirit and contrite Heart, which God will not despise. But God does, and Man too would, despise a feigned, voluntary, affected Humility. Inquire therefore whether your being abased is thus sincere or feigned.

Once more, Look into the *Depth* of your Humility. Perhaps you are low in your own Eyes, merely because of some particular Defects of Capacity or Knowledge; or chiefly because of some Enormities or Irregularities in your Practice. If this be all, it is not sufficiently deep. But if that which makes you self-abased, is a View of your own spiritual Emptiness and Poverty; a View of the Corruptions of your Nature, and the Sins of your Thoughts and Affections; and you see yourselves in such a Light, as to be heartily willing to receive all Salvation as a Gift entirely free, and to be truly thankful for every Degree of Hope you are favoured with, as utterly undeserved and unprocured by you; then you are among the Number of those, whom Christ, first of all, pronounces blessed, saying, *Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*, Matth. v. 3.

Thus inquire into the Genuineness of your Experiences, and look up to the blessed Spirit to enable you to pass a right Judgment upon them. The whole is this: If that *Faith, Hope, Love, Delight* and *Humility* you experience in yourselves, tend to wean you more and more from Sin
and

and the World, to win you over to embrace and admire the free Grace of the Gospel, and to make you depend upon and delight in Christ both for Justification and Sanctification, your Graces are true and genuine, not spurious and counterfeit.

But, after all that can be said upon this searching Subject, I know that in many Cases no clear Satisfaction can be given or received in a Way of Self-examination. There is a Necessity for the Witness of God's Spirit to join with ours, to assure us that we are the Children of God. There is so much Darkness in our Minds, Deceitfulness in our Hearts, and Perplexity in our Thoughts, that the clearest Cases will sometimes be clouded, and the brightest Evidences obscured.

You will say then, What must a poor Soul do in such Circumstances? When he cannot gain the Satisfaction he wants by reason of the Spirit's Withdrawment, must he abstain from the peculiar Privileges of Church Fellowship? Must he desist from a regular Reception of the Lord's Supper, until these Matters be cleared up to Satisfaction?

I shall give my Answer to this in the *Application*, which shall be, (1.) for *Encouragement*, (2.) for *Reproof*, (3.) for *Warning*.

1. For *Encouragement*. Let me here speak a free Word to such poor doubting Souls. Let me ask you, Are you conscious of indulging and embracing any secret or open Sin? Do you harbour any sinister or worldly Views in desiring to eat of the Children's Bread? Do you want to make a justifying Righteousness of this special Ordinance? I hope you can answer in the Negative to these Queries, by saying, that, so far as you know your own Hearts, you would not, you dare not. If so, then

then you do not impose upon the Church, or pervert the Design of the Ordinance in your Reception of it.

Do you still say, "Oh, but I fear, and have great Reason to fear, that I have been a Self-deceiver; for I cannot come to any clear Evidence of the Truth of my Graces and Experiences?" And do you therefore think it your Duty to desist, upon this Account, from attending at the Lord's Table? Think again, what would be the Consequence, if every doubting Soul were to reason in this Manner? If none but those that were free from Doubts would attend, I fear that very few would be found at the Sacramental Feast. Our Churches are thin enough already; many gracious Persons keep themselves from the Fellowship of a Church upon the same Account. And how few, very few, would honour Christ by such a Profession of his Name, if all were to act upon this Plan? And what will you say as to the Pastor himself? Do you think him to be always free from such Doubts, Fears and Perplexities of Soul? If you do, you are very much mistaken. And what if he should absent himself every Time his Heart was dubious and perplexed? This would run Church Ordinances into Confusion indeed. It is therefore abundantly evident, that a serious Church Member should not absent himself from the Lord's Table, because of his Doubts and Fears. No, no: Doubting, distressed Souls should rather come, that there their Doubts may be scattered, their Faith strengthened, and their Comforts restored. Come and welcome, so that you come with Views and Desires to meet with Christ, to see him, to receive from him, and to testify your Regard for him, as the chief Desire and only Hope of your Souls. You need not fear receiving any Damage by coming unworthily, if you come with
such

such Views as these ; but may rather hope to find Christ and his Love there shed abroad in your Hearts.

2. I have now a Word of *Reproof* to many serious Christians. I cannot but find fault with several for being always upon the Complaint. You harbour your Doubts and Fears, you encourage them ; your Souls refuse to be comforted ; you are always making Scruples, raising Objections, and seem to be resolved not to be satisfied with the plainest Evidences. Such a Temper as this is surely dishonourable to Christianity ; it is grieving the good Spirit ; and it is ungrateful to God, who has given you some Tokens of his Love. Because he has not given you all the Grace and Comfort he has to others, you will therefore continually suspect his Love. But I must leave this Charge to every one's own Conscience ; and while I heartily pity those, who are truly in Darkness and Distress of Soul, I must say that those are much to be blamed, who are fond of recommending themselves to their Fellow-Christians by making themselves appear as very dark and discouraged. Those who are this Way inclined do insensibly sink themselves lower and lower, and provoke the Spirit of God more and more to withdraw his enlightening and comforting Influence. Once more :

3. A Word for *Warning* and *Conviction*. Remember there are three Sorts of Church Members : Those who have their Evidences clear, and Graces in Exercise ; those who are under Darkness and Doubts ; and those who mind none of these Things, so as they can but keep up a visible Profession, and maintain their Credit among Christians. These last are very easy and satisfied ; they have no Scruples nor Doubts ; and think it enough, if they can but keep themselves from falling under the Censure of the Church, or of their Fellow Professors. Let me tell you, that such as these, it is to be feared, are

Tares among the Wheat. These have great Reason to suspect, that all is not right with them. And though I would do and say all I could to encourage the serious, dubious Soul; yet I must proclaim, that such carnal Gofpellers are in the most dangerous Condition. They receive this Sacrament only to keep the Name alive; and, by continuing in this Way, they stifle the Convictions of their own Consciences, harden their own Hearts more and more, and are in Danger of falling into Sin and Hell from all their Profession and Privileges. If these Lines come into the Hands of any such, oh, that they may be made to strike home to their Consciences; and remind them, that the Case of the serious, fearful and dubious Soul, who comes with Trembling and Concern to the Table of the Lord, is abundantly preferable to theirs, who boldly claim a Privilege with no higher View, than to support the Name they bear in the Eyes of others. May the Lord convince and deter such, while he comforts and encourages the feeble-minded by his Word and Spirit.

CASE XXIV.

Whether a Person can desire the Blood of Christ to be applied to his Soul, and yet be an Hypocrite?

THIS Question gives me an Opportunity of clearing a Point, which appears full of Difficulties in the View of some, is treated by others as an enthusiastick Fancy, but is a Point of the greatest Importance to Souls. The Application or Sprinkling of the Blood of Christ is absolutely necessary to our everlasting Salvation, however unintelligible the Phrase may appear to unenlightened Minds. It is the peculiar Glory of Revelation to make known this important Mystery, to let us see how Salvation comes to us, and to encourage us, in our Application for it, in the Way which is most for the Glory of God, and our Happiness.—Yet, notwithstanding the clear Revelation of this most interesting Truth, many have but confused Conceptions of it, and cannot get their Ideas clear and free from Perplexity. To set this Point therefore in as distinct a Light as I can, I would do these three Things :

- I. *Consider what is meant by the Blood of Christ.*
 - II. *How this Blood is applied to, or sprinkled upon us.*
- And,
- III. *For what Purposes it is applied.* A Consideration of these Things will, I hope, free the Subject from all

Difficulties, and furnish our Friend with a sufficient Answer to his Question. — And may God bless what may be delivered, to enlighten our Minds more and more in these great and distinguishing Truths of Christianity, and bring us to an hearty Acceptance of, and Dependence upon, the great Sacrifice for Sin, for all the Ends it was designed to answer.

I. *I am to consider what is meant by the Blood of Christ.* — We have frequent Mention made of the *Blood of Christ* in the New Testament, which, by a *Synechdoche*, is put for *all his Sufferings in Life and Death*, all being of the greatest Importance to us. His Agony in the Garden, as well as his other Sufferings, must be considered. Much Stress seems to be laid indeed upon his Death, and much imputed to it, because without this he could have been *no Saviour*; *this was the last Act of his Obedience*; now the *Wrath of God*, in a peculiar Manner, lay heavy upon him; *Men and Devils now united their Force against, and vigorously beset him*; and *now he spoiled Principalities and Powers, and triumphed over them openly*. For these Reasons we have a particular Mention made of the Death of Christ. Thus the Apostle says, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Gal. vi. 14. But he does not mention this to exclude the Sufferings of his Life, or even the Obedience which Christ paid to the preceptive Part of the Law; the Apostle being sensible of the great Importance of all these to his Salvation; but he might particularly mention the Cross of Christ for the above Considerations. — *Blood signifies farther, that Christ suffered in his whole human Nature.* The Blood of the Sacrifices of old was to be *sprinkled upon the Altar, and to make Atonement for Sin*, Lev. xvii. 11. Now in the Blood lay the *Life of the Beast*, and therefore the *Jews* were

were forbidden to eat Blood, Verse 10. The Blood sprinkled was *typical*, and shewed what was absolutely necessary in the *great Sacrifice* that was to be offered, *viz.* that not only the *Blood of the Lamb of God* should be *actually shed*, or that his Body should be wounded, but that *his Soul too* should be pierced and bruised. This we find was indeed the Case. *He made his Soul an Offering for Sin*, Isaiah liii. 10. *His Soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto Death*, Matth. xxvi. 38. It was the Agony of his Soul chiefly, that discovered its Intensity by his bloody Sweat in the Garden. Oh, the Anguish he must feel when drinking the bitter Cup! No wonder innocent Nature struggled at the View. *God spared not his Son.* He spared neither Body nor Soul, but bruised them both, that so the Sacrifice might be complete. Thus, by the Blood of Christ, we must understand all the Sufferings of his human Nature both in Life and at Death, or all that was necessary to his being a proper Propitiation for Sin.—But, as the active and passive Obedience of Christ are not to be separated, but are both necessary to our Justification before God; so I would not speak of one to oppose or exclude the other, but have my Eye upon both, as being of the utmost Importance.—Let us now consider,

II. *How this Blood is applied to, or sprinkled upon us.* It is not enough for us, that the Blood of Christ was shed; unless it is applied to us, we shall never receive any saving Benefit from it. It is called therefore *the Blood of sprinkling*, because it is sprinkled upon us, *Heb.* xii. 24. The Saints above are said to have *washed their Robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb*, *Rev.* vii. 14. Here is something else then to be considered, besides the offering the Sacrifice. There must be an Application of it, or else the great Ends and Purposes

of it can never be answered. Now in this Application of the Blood of Christ there are two Acts, an Act of God, and an Act of ours : Both these are absolutely necessary to our enjoying the Blessings purchased by the Blood of Christ. Particularly,

1. *God sprinkles this Blood upon us.*—This is by an Act of Imputation, a Foundation for which was laid in the Substitution of Christ in our room and stead. The Lord therefore is said to *lay on him the Iniquities of us all*, Isaiah liii. 6. And the Apostle says, *that he his own self bare our Sins in his own Body on the Tree*, 1 Pet. ii. 24. And again, 2 Cor. v. 21. *He hath made him to be Sin for us*. He suffered and died as a Sinner, though he was not actually so. He bore the Punishment which the Sins of his People deserved ; and this opens a Way for God's dealing with us according to the infinite Virtue and Merit of the Redeemer's Sacrifice, or for imputing his Righteousness to us. Upon the whole, when Christ was obeying the Law, and suffering its Penalty, God considered Christ as the Representative of his People ; and therefore, in his own Time, in a perfect Consistency with his Justice, and by an Act of his Grace, he imputes this Righteousness to us, or makes it ours, so as effectually to answer all the Ends and Purposes for which it was appointed. The impressing the Heart and Conscience with a View of this atoning Blood for its Relief under all Disquietude, is likewise an Act of God, and of great Importance to fill the Soul with Joy and Peace in believing.

2. *There is an Act of ours too, necessary to the real and saving Application of the Blood of Christ to our Souls.*—This is *to believe*. Faith must be wrought in us, and exercised by us, or else we can have no Interest in the Death of Christ, nor receive any saving Advantage from it.

Faith

Faith is the Hand which the Soul stretches forth, and lays hold of Christ and his Righteousness: It is that by which the Sinner transfers his Sins to Christ, lays his Hand upon the Head of the great High-Priest, and makes Confession of his Sins, views the Intent and Virtue of the Redeemer's Blood, pleads it with the Father, and makes it all his Dependence. Thus both these Acts are necessary, absolutely necessary to our Interest in Christ, and all the important Blessings he has purchased. By the one, God *sprinkles* this Blood upon us; by the other, the Sinner *receives* it. The one is of *Imputation*, the other is of *Believing*. The one is an Act of God's *Grace towards us*, the other is a *Grace implanted in us*, and exercised by us, under the Influences of the Spirit of God. And here we may observe, that *God and the Sinner have the same Ends in View, the one in sprinkling, the other in receiving this Blood*. There must be an Union in this important Point, or else there can be no Communion with God, no Enjoyment of him. And therefore you will find in the Sinner, when properly applying to the Blood of Christ, a Frame of Mind corresponding with the Purposes of God in the Appointment and Sprinkling of this Blood. This brings me,

III. To inquire into the Purposes of God in the Shedding and Application of the Blood of Christ; and we shall find, that these very Purposes the Sinner has in View in looking to this Blood, and so shall have a sufficient Answer to this Question. And here I shall not confine myself to the Sufferings of Christ, but take into Consideration the whole of that Righteousness which God imputes, and which the Sinner receives, as this will by no means be inconsistent with the Question sent me.

Now the Design of this Blood, in its being shed for us, and sprinkled upon us, is threefold, *viz. To justify us*

before God—To give Peace to our Consciences, and Boldness at the Throne of Grace—and To promote our Sanctification. To answer these important Purposes, God imputes the Righteousness of the great Mediator to us; and these are the Ends the Sinner has in View in looking to it, receiving and depending upon it.

1. *The Blood or Righteousness of Christ is designed to justify us before God.*—If we consider it as intending the *Sufferings and Death of Christ*, these were absolutely necessary to make Atonement for Sin, by satisfying infinite Justice, and opening a Way for God's pardoning the guilty Creature, in a Consistency with the Glory of every divine Perfection. This was the End of Christ's Sacrifice. It was a *true expiatory Sacrifice*, and therefore typified by the Sacrifices of old. In this, and no other Sense, can he with the least Propriety be said to be the *Lamb of God, taking away the Sins of the World*. This would by no means have been a suitable Character for him, if he had only lived and died as an *Example*, and to confirm the Doctrines he preached. *He was wounded for our Sins, he was bruised for our Iniquities, the Chastisement of our Peace was upon him, that by his Stripes we might be healed*, Isaiah liii. 5. *He was made a Curse for us, that he might deliver us from the Curse of the Law we are naturally under*, Gal. iii. 13. When his Blood is sprinkled upon us, our Iniquities are forgiven; we may look upon the Sword of divine Justice as sheathed, and God as become reconciled. If we consider the Phrase, *Blood of Christ*, as including his *Obedience to the preceptive Part of the Law*, we shall have a compleat Righteousness to introduce us actually into the Favour of God, make us appear amiable in his Sight, and give us an unquestionable Title to eternal Life, as well as a full Atonement to procure our Pardon, and to deliver us from
ever-

everlasting Punishment. This is the Righteousness, which is the only justifying Righteousness of a poor Sinner. This is the Righteousness which the Apostle *Paul* desired above all things to be found cloathed with, *Phil. iii. 9.* This is the Righteousness which is by Faith; the Righteousness with which infinite Justice is well pleased; the Righteousness which the Believer carries with him out of Time into Eternity, and appears in before the Bar of God. In fine, the Design of God in imputing this Righteousness, and the Design of the Soul in applying to it by Faith, is his Justification. And there is in the Sinner, in receiving this Righteousness, a *Frame of Mind* suitable to the End God has in View in the Imputation of it. Thus, is it designed for his justifying Righteousness? The Soul comes *humble*, under a suitable Sense of the Insufficiency of all his own religious Duties and Services to answer that Purpose, renouncing all he has done, acknowledging himself to be but an unprofitable Servant, and pleading to be cloathed with this Wedding Garment, and looking to it alone for Justification before God. But,

2. *Another End of the Blood of Christ is to give Peace to Conscience, and Boldness and Confidence before God.*—The Apostle exhorts us, when we draw near to God, to do it in *full Assurance of Faith*, having our *Hearts sprinkled from an evil Conscience*, *Heb. x. 22.* It is the Application of the Blood of *Christ* by Faith, that alone can deliver us from a terrifying and condemning Conscience, silence all its Clamours, and fill it with solid Peace and Tranquillity. When a Soul therefore is awakened and distressed with Sin, he can find no Rest, till he is enabled to view and apply the *Blood of Christ*. When he considers the infinite Evil there is in Sin, and the many Transgressions he is chargeable with; when

when he views the condemning Sentence of the Law, and the Justice and Holiness of God, he is filled with distressing Fears, till he fixes his Eye upon the Sacrifice of *Christ*. He is afraid to come into the Presence of God, is ready to think it Presumption to hope for his Favour, and that he is one cast off, and must expect to be doomed to everlasting Darkness, the Portion which he has justly deserved. His Conscience is like the restless Sea, ever uneasy ; it wounds, it terrifies him : He hears no Sound but that of everlasting Burnings ; he knows not where to fly for Peace : He goes to Duty, thinking that will give him Relief ; but so many Imperfections appearing, this will yield him no Satisfaction. But when he is led to view the *Blood of Christ*, the eternal Appointment of the great Sacrifice, its perfect Acceptableness to the Father, and its infinitely atoning Virtue ; when the Spirit realizes to, and impresses upon his Conscience the atoning Sufferings of *Christ*, shedding abroad the dying Love of the Redeemer in his Heart : when he is enabled by Faith to apply it to his guilty Soul, he finds it a Cordial indeed ; it opens a Door of Hope in all his Distress, and fills him with Joy and Peace in believing. Thus *Christ* gives Rest to labouring and heavy-laden Souls.—Methinks, I see the poor distressed Creature emerging out of his Difficulties, and lifting up his Head with Comfort, saying to Conscience—“ Oh
“ Conscience, how hast thou wounded me with thy
“ killing Language, thy repeated and painful Stings !
“ I knew not what to do ; fly from thee I could not ;
“ approach the Throne of God I durst not with any
“ lively Hope ; but now I have found a Messenger, one
“ among a thousand, one who is able to answer to
“ all thy Accusations, to remove all thy heavy and
“ awful Charges, and to speak Peace to my weary
“ Soul.

“Soul. See the *Blood of Christ*! Hear, it speaks better
“*Things than the Blood of Abel*. Am I guilty? through
“this I shall have Pardon. Am I unworthy? there is
“an infinite Fulness of Merit in this. Have I violated
“the Law of God? *Christ* was made a Curse for me.
“With his Sacrifice in the Arms of my Faith, I can
“view a holy God, come into his Presence with the
“Boldness and Confidence of a Child, and expect all
“the Blessings of Salvation.”—Thus it speaks Peace to
Conscience.

3. *The Blood of Christ is the great Means of our Sanctification.* It not only purchased Grace for us, but is the great Means of encreasing it in us. *Christ* came to purify his People, and a believing View of his Sacrifice tends greatly to bring about this important Purpose. When the Believer is enabled to apply the Blood of *Christ* to his Soul, to view its infinite Virtue, the Riches of Grace manifested in it, and the Blessings he enjoys through the Application of it; oh, he finds in it the most powerful Dissuasives from Sin, and the strongest Motives to Holiness; he finds it sweetly melting his hard Heart, filling him with Hatred of Sin, with deep Self-abhorrence, stirring him up to a holy Diligence and Watchfulness in the Service of God, animating him with Boldness and Courage, reconciling him to every Difficulty, filling him with Patience and Cheerfulness in every Trial, endearing the Lord Jesus Christ to him, kindling the Fire of divine Love, and bringing him into a greater Conformity to the Image of Christ. There is nothing gives a greater Stab to Sin, nothing crucifies our Lusts and Corruptions more, than a View of a crucified Saviour. When we look upon him that was pierced, *we mourn*, Zech. xiv. 10. When the Apostle viewed the Cross of Christ, he *found himself crucified*

crucified to this World, and this World to him *.—Upon the whole, there is nothing destroys Sin more in the Soul, than to look to Christ on the Cross. They therefore are always the most flourishing Christians, who converse most with Christ by Faith. These then are the Ends God had in View in establishing this Way of Salvation, in the shedding the Blood of Christ, and sprinkling it upon the Soul. Now, if these are the Ends you have in View in desiring to have this Blood applied to your Souls, it is a comfortable Evidence of your being Christians indeed. For Instance; If, sensible of your Guilt, and the Insufficiency of your own Righteousness to justify you before God, you are willing to receive him as your Lord your Righteousness resting upon the infinite Merit of his Blood alone; if you look to this to ease your wounded Conscience, give you Boldness and Confidence in your Approaches to God, and support you under every Accusation of Sin and Satan; if you desire this Blood to be applied to your Soul to cleanse it more and more from the Pollution of Sin, and to purify your Heart, that you may be growing in Holiness, you may then conclude that you have passed from Death unto Life, and are far from being an Hypocrite. But if you approve only of the Justification of a Sinner by the Righteousness of Christ, and see not a Beauty in real Holiness; if you would have the Blood of Christ sprinkled upon you to deliver you from everlasting Punishment, but not to cleanse your polluted Heart; if you would be saved from Hell, but yet live in Sin, you have no Reason to look upon yourself as a real Christian; and therefore all your Expectations of Pardon and Salvation from Christ will meet with an awful Disappointment. Christ must not be divided. • If we are not willing to receive him in all his Characters, it is in vain to call ourselves Christians. He is made of God to all his People *Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption.*

* Gal. vi. 14.

Thus you are furnished with an Answer to the above important Question. I shall now close all with a Word or two of Improvement. And,

1. *Hence we see how lovely the Lord Jesus Christ should appear to us all.*—Did he come and obey the Law? Did he come and submit to the Death of the Cross? Did he bear the Wrath of God, and give his Life a Ransom; and all this for us, to make Atonement for our Sins, and secure to us all the Blessings of Salvation? How amazing the Love! How hard the Heart that feels no Affection for this Jesus! How ungrateful the Creature who can despise the Redeemer! His Love should recommend him to all. It will recommend him to all the Saints. They love him here, and they long often for a better World, where they will love him with a supreme and undivided Affection.

2. *If any would know whether their Hopes of eternal Life are rightly founded, we see what Enquiries they must make.*—Not only whether they believe the Gospel, with all its important Truths; but whether they see their Need of the Blood of Christ; consequently whether they see themselves guilty, naked, polluted and miserable; whether they are willing to fly to the Lord Jesus Christ, and are enabled to depend upon him for all Salvation; whether they want to be sprinkled with his Blood, not only for their Justification, but Sanctification too. These are Enquiries of the most important Nature, and should be attended to by all who would know the State of their Souls.

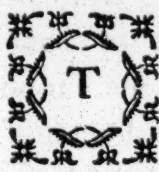
3. *Hence we see where Relief must be found for a distressed Soul.* The Righteousness, the Death, the Suretyship of Christ are what lay a Foundation of Comfort to awakened Sinners. Here is Room for the chief of Sinners to hope for Pardon, for the greatest Backsliders to except Mercy. Here is a sovereign Balm, which will heal every wounded Spirit. When thou
art

art discouraged on Account of thy Sins, their Heinousness, their Number, thy Unworthiness; and art ready to conclude that there is no Hope for thee; look upon the Blood of Christ; consider for what Ends it was shed; view its infinite Virtue; hear what the glorious Mediator said just before he gave up the Ghost, *It is finished*; and view the happy thousands above, all the living Evidences of the saving Efficacy of Christ's Death and Sufferings. Art thou a great Sinner? the Blood of Christ proclaims Pardon. Hast thou a hard Heart? the Blood of Christ, applied by Faith, will quickly melt it. Art thou full of Terrors of Soul? this Blood is sufficient to remove all, allay the furious Storm, and cause a perfect Calm, a peaceful Serenity. Art thou sadly entangled with thy Corruptions? this same Blood can set thee free, and cleanse thy polluted Soul. It is an overflowing Fountain, always full. Its Virtue is not in the least exhausted. Come then, ye despairing Sinners! come, thou dejected Creature! the Blood of Christ can remove all thy Complaints. Thou mayst say with the Apostle *, *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right Hand of God, who maketh also Intercession for us.* To him be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

* Rom. viii. 34.

C A S E XXV.

How shall a Person know whether the Obedience he performs flows from true Faith?

 HE taking this serious and spiritual Case under Consideration was occasioned by the Reception of the following judicious Letter; which indeed puts a Question, that, at first Appearance, seems very different from that now before me. However, upon an attentive View of the Letter, and its principal Design, it will appear, that the Solution of the above Case will answer the chief End of the Letter. It runs thus:

Reverend S I R,

“ I Would humbly propose the following Question to
 “ be answered, if you think proper, in your *Wednes-*
 “ *day* Evening Lecture, which may possibly be of Use
 “ to others, in similar Circumstances, as well as to my-
 “ self.

“ The Question is this, Whether Faith, as containing
 “ in its Nature the Soul’s *Affent* to the great Gospel Pro-
 “ mise of Salvation, and *Consent* that Jesus should be its
 “ Saviour in particular, according to the Tenor of that
 “ Promise, may not be looked upon as evidential of
 “ Union to Christ, and the Safety of my spiritual State
 “ in

“ in him ? And whether a conscious Perception of these
 “ Actings of my Understanding and Choice may not be
 “ considered as Criterions of true Faith, and improved
 “ as such, although the Joy of Faith, Vigour of Hope,
 “ and Ardour of Affection be for a Time absent, and
 “ inward Corruptions violently (at Times) oppose the
 “ forming such a Conclusion ?

“ My Reason for confining the Query to the Grace of
 “ *Faith*, is, from the Difficulty I find in ascertaining the
 “ Truth of my *Love*, *Repentance*, *Opposition to Sin*, and
 “ even my *Obedience* itself, unless all these appear in me
 “ to flow from Faith in Christ as their Principle.

“ Another Reason is, In examining myself as to my
 “ State or Frame, I find, that if my Conscience is mista-
 “ ken, or ignorant of the *Rule of God's Word*, all the
 “ Conclusions resulting from comparing my Heart and
 “ Ways with it must be wrong and uncertain in the
 “ same Degree, as my Conscience is erroneous, and its
 “ Testimony false. These Things considered, make
 “ me very anxious to know the Truth of my Case. I
 “ am afraid of Self-deceit. I have long been of Opini-
 “ on, that Faith without Works is dead, or rather is
 “ no Faith at all : And I am equally certain, that Works,
 “ however splendid, without Faith as their animating
 “ Principle, are dead Works also. For the End of the
 “ *Commandment* is *Charity*, out of a *pure Heart*, a *good*
 “ *Conscience*, and *Faith unfeigned* ; which I am persuaded
 “ are either all together, or else do not exist at all in my
 “ Heart. I remain

Your obliged Servant, &c.

In perusing this Epistle you will easily see, that the
 Question, as first laid down, is rather put in a specula-
 tive than in an experimental Form. But the evident
 Scope

Scope and Design of it is to enter deep into Christian Experience. For which Reason I have chosen to alter the Form of the Question, and place it in a more compendious and experimental View; which best comports with the Design of this Exercise, and at the same time will fully answer the End proposed by the Letter; namely, to know whether our Repentance, Love and Obedience be genuine and evangelical; or, in other Words, whether our Obedience flows from true Faith.

Let me then observe, as an Introduction to the whole; it is a great Mercy, that the Truth and Reality of Faith in our Hearts does not depend upon the distinct Knowledge of its Nature and Workings. Many Persons doubtless have this divine Principle wrought in them, and they feel its Workings, though they know not how to describe its Nature, or to give a proper Account of its Actings even in their own Minds. It is indeed of some Importance to have a doctrinal Knowledge of this fundamental Grace; because those that have are the better able to judge concerning their own Experiences, and may by their Knowledge arrive at a more clear and solid Satisfaction about their own State or Frames. But yet it is abundantly more desirable and important to know it experimentally than doctrinally; and it is frequently found, that when a Soul, under the Influences of the Spirit, is drawn forth to exercise this amiable Grace, there is such a Mixture and such a Variety of Affections working, that it would be difficult to describe them, or conceive the Manner in which they work. Let us not then be so solicitous to know the Nature of Faith in a doctrinal or controversial Way, as to trace its chief Evidences and Appearances in our own Souls, and its Effects upon our Actions and Conduct.

To assist you in this Examination is the Design of the following Lines : And we shall be able to see the beautiful and experimental Connection between Faith and Obedience by attending to these two interesting Questions.

I. *What is that Faith which produces true Obedience ?*
And,

II. *What is that Obedience which flows from true Faith ?*

I. *What is that Faith which produces true Obedience ?*
There are various Sorts of Faith mentioned in Scripture, which have been exercised or experienced by the Children of Men. Some of which are of a spiritual and saving Nature ; but others are such Kinds of Faith, as may be in Persons who are Strangers to all true Grace and Holiness. It is therefore necessary that we should carefully distinguish between that Sort of Faith which produces true Obedience, and that which can never produce it. There was a *miraculous* Faith, whereby Persons were able to perform Miracles, which Faith, however valuable, was notwithstanding exercised by some of those that knew nothing of the Grace of God in Truth. There is likewise an *historical* or *speculative* Faith, whereby Persons understand and believe the Truths of the Gospel with their Heads, and in the Notion of them. And many now have this Sort of Faith, who are dead in Trespasses and Sins. There is likewise a *temporary* Faith, which is so much like to a true saving Faith, that it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish the one from the other. This temporary Faith is that, whereby a Person not only believes the Truth in his Notion, but has some sort of Relish for it, Approbation of it, nay, and Feeling of it too in his Mind. But after all, the Truth only
floats

floats upon his Affections, and does not enter deep into the Heart and Conscience.

Now neither of these forementioned Sorts of Faith is of such a Nature as to produce true Obedience. For nothing will produce true Holiness, short of such an inward spiritual Belief and Impression of Gospel Truth, as effectually prevails upon the Soul to go to and receive the Lord Jesus Christ for all Salvation.

Our Friend in the Letter inquires, whether an *Assent* to, joined with an *Approbation* of the Gospel Method of Salvation, be not sufficient to evidence the Truth of our Faith, and the Safety of our State, although we may not have that Joy, Hope and Comfort, which some are favoured with? To which I readily answer, That doubtless our Faith may be true and saving, though it be not attended with such Satisfaction and Assurance, as to fill the Soul with Peace and Joy.

Faith may be true, and yet be very weak; it may be true, and yet be sadly suppressed or overborne as to its Actings and Exercises. Yea, it may be both true and *strong*, and yet be without much spiritual Joy and Consolation; for a strong Faith may be overloaded with and borne down by Temptations. A Soul may truly go to Christ, though with a trembling Heart; and may truly receive Christ, though with a trembling Hand; and may have a strong Reliance upon Jesus Christ, and yet be distressed and perplexed. But though all this be allowed, yet I cannot apprehend, that a mere Assent to and Approbation of Christ, and the Method of Salvation, is the whole that is included in that Faith which produces true Obedience. There must be some real Application to Christ, and some real Application of Christ to us, in order to answer this End.

Let us then see how the Scriptures describe the essential Actings of saving Faith, and endeavour to render this important Subject familiar to our Minds by comparing natural and spiritual Things together.

Every one that has read his Bible with any Attention will see, that true Faith is frequently set forth by a *Coming* to Christ, and *Receiving* of him. Let us then take into Consideration these two Ideas, and see what we can learn from them for our Instruction into the Nature of true Faith and its Actings. In order to conceive of these Things aright, we must take this general Rule with us: Let us observe what is included in the Act of a necessitous Person, when he *goes to* a rich generous Person for Help, and *receives* a Supply at his Hands: Only cast aside the mere external Acts of Coming and Receiving, and see what Thoughts and Affections are working in his Mind, when performing these external Acts.

The Reason why we are, in this Comparison, to cast aside the external Acts of the Body, is, because Faith is only a *spiritual* Act of the Mind and Heart. Retaining therefore the spiritual Part of these Acts, we may draw the Similitude between natural and spiritual Coming and Receiving to great Advantage.

Let us then suppose a poor necessitous Person to have heard of a generous and wealthy Gentleman: How well soever he may know this generous Person, how much soever he may know about him, and how much soever he may approve of his Method of distributing his Bounty; yet if, after all, he does not actually go to this Gentleman, and receive a Supply from him, the necessitous Person is still as poor as ever. So that his mere Knowledge and Approbation will not suffice without *coming* and *receiving*. On the other hand, let us suppose the necessitous Person to have but little Knowledge

ledge of this generous Gentleman; to have only heard perhaps his Name and Character in general, yea, and to have some Fears in his Mind, lest he should not be accepted or supplied; yet if he has Knowledge enough, and Hope enough, to induce him to go, and goes accordingly, he receives the Bounty, and is supplied. So that the Smallness of his Knowledge, and the Greatness of his Fears, are no effectual Bar in the Way of his receiving the Benefit. From whence it appears, that there may be much Knowledge of Christ, and some Consent to the Method of his Grace, and no Act of saving Faith; while, on the contrary, there may be but little Knowledge and many Fears, and yet a true Act of Faith put forth. Some Knowledge there must be of Christ, otherwise the Sinner knows not where to go for Salvation; and there must be a real Approbation of Christ as a Saviour, or the Sinner will never apply to him. But, by a close Attention to this Simile, and applying it to spiritual Purposes, we shall see that, besides a mere *Assent* and *Consent*, there are in the Act of saving Faith these following Particulars:

(1.) There is a *personal Concern* in his Heart, who exercises Faith in Christ. A necessitous Person will never go for a Supply, unless he knows his own Necessity, and is concerned about it. Thus, whenever a Soul goes to Christ by Faith, he has a real Sight and Sense of his own Emptiness and Necessity; he feels his own Wants pressing upon him; sees himself unable to obtain a Supply for himself by his own Industry or Merit; cannot be contented in his present starving or naked Condition; and this awakens him to seek out after Help for himself. An unconvinced, unconcerned Soul does not, cannot exercise an Act of Faith upon Christ. Thus then it is evident, that a true Concern about the Salva-

tion of our Souls, and about an Interest in Christ, is necessary in an Act of saving Faith.

(2.) There is likewise a *probable Hope* of Acceptance and Supply in that Soul that actually goes to Christ for Salvation. If a necessitous Person conceives no Probability of succeeding in his Application, he will not go. Though a full *Affurance* of Success is not absolutely necessary, yet *some Hope* of it is, to encourage a poor Person in his first setting out. This Hope may indeed, in some Cases, be as it were but a Peradventure; but then it is such a Probability as he believes he has not elsewhere. Like the Lepers at the Gates of *Samaria*; they knew that if they continued where they were, they should die; if they went into the City, they knew they must perish there, because of the Famine; but they conceived that if they went to the Camp of the Enemy, they may possibly be saved alive. This expresses the lowest Degree of Hope, that will be a Foundation for making a Trial. I mention this, not that convinced perishing Souls may content themselves with such a weak Hope. No, no; for I may boldly assure such distressed Souls, that they have, from the Promises of the Gospel, the firmest Ground to hope for Success in their Application to Christ. The Difference between a Sinner's going to Christ, and these Lepers going into the Camp of the *Syrians*, is very great. For these Lepers went to the Camp of an *Enemy*; but a Sinner, in applying to Christ, goes to him who is the *Friend* of Sinners, and has said, *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

Only let me observe, that this probable Hope, which a Sinner has in the first Actings of Faith, is not founded upon any Good he may fancy in himself, nor upon any Duties he performs; but is founded entirely and alone upon the Freeness of divine Grace, and upon the Report that

that the Scriptures have given of Christ, as one ready to receive the most unworthy, to welcome the most guilty, and to supply the most necessitous. Thus then the Sinner, in coming to Christ, not only approves of Christ, but has some Degree of Hope in him, by turning his Eye towards, and fixing his Thoughts upon the Hope held forth in the Gospel Invitation.

(3.) There is likewise an *actual Application to Christ* made by the Soul that believes in his Name. A necessitous Person is not only concerned about, and desirous of a Supply; not only hopes to receive it, but he, in Consequence, actually applies for it. Thus the Soul, in believing, having his *Concern* raised by a Sight and Feeling of his own Need, having his *Desires* raised by a View of the Fullness and Suitableness of Christ, and having his *Hope* raised by a Belief of the Freeness of the Gospel, he forthwith addresses himself to Christ, or to God in Christ, by earnest Prayer and Supplication. He goes to the Throne of Grace, offers up his Desires to God, lays forth his Sinfulness and Misery before God, and pleads the Promises and Invitations of the Gospel. He voluntarily casts aside all his vain Hopes, and casts himself upon the free Mercy of God in Christ. Once more,

(4.) There is likewise a *spiritual Application of Christ* made to the Soul in the Act of believing. A necessitous Person not only comes for a Supply, but he likewise *takes* it to himself, *receives* it for his own Use; otherwise he is still never the better; he is still in the same Necessity as before. Thus the Soul in believing receives Christ and his Blessings, Christ and his Promises to itself, for its own Use. The Believer makes use of Christ's Blood for his Pardon, his Righteousness for his Justification, his Promises for his Support and Comfort, and his Fullness for his Supply. The

applying of Christ to ourselves in this Way is a Matter of the greatest Consequence. It is what is expressed as a fundamental Act of saving Faith, *John i. 12. As many as received him, to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name.* And what is it thus to *receive Christ*? It is something that is better experienced than expressed. In this Act the Soul takes Christ home to itself for its own; it appropriates him to itself, in all his Characters and Offices, as a free and compleat Saviour. And though this may be done with a trembling Hand and a fearful Heart, yet there is still in it an Application of Christ to ourselves, whereby we are enabled to apprehend him for ourselves. To express myself as plainly as I can upon this deep and spiritual Subject, I would lay it forth in the following Manner: The Believer sees what himself and what Christ is, and makes an affecting Comparison between what is in himself and what is in Christ. He sees that Christ's Atonement answers to his own Guilt, Christ's Righteousness to his Unworthiness, Christ's purifying Spirit to his Pollution, Christ's Strength to his Weakness, Christ's Riches to his Poverty, and Christ's Fullness to his own Emptiness. Having seen and been affected with this exact Suitableness and Correspondence of what is in Christ to his own Wants, he is in some Measure persuaded of Christ's Freeness and Willingness to give himself to the Soul; and therefore ventures, humbly ventures to take Christ home to himself. He applies Christ's Atonement to his own Guilt, and thereby answers the Challenges of a guilty Conscience: He applies Christ's Righteousness to his own Unworthiness, and thereby answers the Objections that Unbelief brings against him for it: He applies Christ's Fullness and Riches to his own Emptiness and Poverty, and thereby relieves his Mind under these humbling

bling Views of himself, and says, "What though I am
" so guilty and unworthy, yet let me not be discouraged,
" for Christ is worthy: What though I am poor and
" empty, yet let me not despair, for in Christ all Full-
" ness dwells; and though I am all over polluted, yet
" let me not therefore despond, for the Blood of Jesus
" Christ cleanses from all Sin." And thus the Believer
pacifies his Conscience, silences his Fears, supports his
Hope, satisfies and comforts himself in Christ, by a spe-
cial Application of Christ to himself. This Appropria-
tion is stronger or weaker, according to the Degree of
Faith in Exercise; and sometimes it can triumph over
every Fear, Danger and Distress, by saying, *Who is he
that condemneth? It is Christ that died.* Thus the Soul
and Christ are brought together into a spiritual and expe-
rimental Union; and from hence it comes to pass, that
the Believer purifies himself by washing in Christ's Blood;
can perform Duties in Christ's Name and Strength; can
resist the Devil, overcome Temptation, surmount Diffi-
culties that lie in his Way; out of Weakness is made
strong; and can do all Things through Christ that
strengthens him.

This, this is the Faith that works by Love, that pro-
duces true Obedience. And unless Christ be in some
Degree thus applied to the Soul, there is no Strength for
Obedience, no true Delight in it, nor any Gospel Mo-
tives to it inwrought in the Heart. But if a Soul, know-
ing and approving the Method of Salvation by the Atone-
ment, Righteousness and Purchase of Christ, is really
concerned about an Interest in him, has some Encou-
ragement from the Freeness of the Promises, and there-
upon applies to Christ for Strength and Salvation, and
can now receive Christ to himself; he then begins to
live

live upon Christ, and to work for him, from a Principle of Faith in him, and Love to him. Thus evangelical Repentance is excited, thus evangelical Love is drawn forth, and thus evangelical Obedience is performed.

I have here given you as distinct and regular an Account, as I am able, of the several Particulars contained in that Faith, which produces true Obedience. But after all, I dare not say that these various Motions and Actings of Soul are always to be distinctly discerned in Experience; for they are often so weak and imperfect in themselves, or so intermingled and confused with one another, that we cannot trace them distinctly. However, in the midst of all these Confusions, the believing Soul has such a Regard for Christ, his Grace and Gospel, that what is seen, felt and received, becomes the Spring and Motive of holy Obedience in Heart, Lip and Life. The Truth of our Faith is best known by its Influence and Tendency, rather than by its distinct and particular Actings, which are often so confused. If Christ be so received and applied, as that our Views of him, Regard to him, and Reliance upon him, lead us to him and his Grace for Motives to raise our Abhorrence of Sin, for Strength to subdue it, and for Excitements to Holiness of Heart and Life, we may be sure that our Faith is true and genuine.

Give me Leave to observe, before I pass to the other Question proposed, that this Representation of Faith, as coming to and receiving Christ, is far from casting any Discouragement in the Way of the weak Believer. Some may be ready to say, "Oh, if all this be contained in true Faith, and if there be such an Application of Christ to the Soul in it, then I am destitute of it; for I could never venture thus to appropriate Christ to
" my-

“myself.” But let me ask you, What is it that makes you thus afraid to take Christ home to your Souls? Would you not be glad to do it, and is it not your great Discouragement, that you fear you may not? Let me tell you, that this View of Faith has in it the best and strongest Encouragement to you. For hereby you are told, that if you can heartily approve of Christ, and have a real Concern about an Interest in his Grace and Righteousness, then you may and ought to go to him, plead with him, cast your Souls upon him, and apply all that he has done, suffered and purchased, to your own Souls, for your Satisfaction, Supply and Consolation. Such a Hope and Comfort as this I desire by all means to encourage; and would aim to make it appear to all the Souls that are truly concerned, that they have a Liberty, a free, unrestrained Liberty, to trust in Christ for themselves, and to apply Christ to themselves. Surely you do not desire to be saved without Christ, or to be satisfied without an Interest in him. I would not encourage such a Desire, or promote such a Satisfaction; what I want is to lead you to an Application of Christ to yourselves, that you may be satisfied, comforted and supported in him and by him. And if you can, though in but a low Degree, trust in and rely upon Christ for yourselves, you may be then said in some Measure to know and believe the Love that God hath to you in Jesus Christ. In this Way you will find Strength both to work for Christ, and to fight against Sin and Satan. Which brings me to the other Part of this Discourse,

II. *What is that Obedience which flows from true Faith?* The Letter upon which this Question is founded justly observes, that, *as Faith without Works is dead, so Works without Faith, as their animating Principle, are dead also.*

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They are only splendid Appearances, and little better than shining Sins. Though I would by no means disparage good Works; yet it is highly necessary that our Works be of the right Gospel Stamp, otherwise they are unacceptable to God, and often delude our Souls. But indeed when we come to weigh our Works in the Balance of the Sanctuary, and bring them to the Test of the Gospel, I am ready to suspect, that not only all the Works of Unbelievers, but that many of the Works even of Believers themselves are dead Works. For there are a great Number of Duties performed in a legal, carnal, self-sufficient Manner by the Children of God. Happy is he that can bring forth much spiritual Fruit to the Glory of God, by Works of Faith and Labours of Love: And we ought to be thankful, if in any Instances we can prove that what we do is truly in the Name and Strength of the Lord Jesus. It is therefore necessary to remark, that when we put this Question, *What is that Obedience that flows from true Faith?* it is not done so much with a Design to determine a Person's State, as to shew the Nature of his Duty, and to give him a Rule to judge when his Works are done in a right Manner. We must not conclude that we are destitute of divine Grace, unless every Act we perform is found to flow from true Faith; for then the greatest Believer in this World may well doubt and despond. All of us, even the best of us, will find Reason to look back with Shame upon many of our Duties, and be obliged to confess that they have been dead Works, having little or nothing of the divine Life quickening them. Nay, we shall often detect ourselves of being kept back from some Sins, and stirred up to some Duties, by the most mean, carnal and worldly Motives, rather by restraining than by renewing Grace.

Grace. It is therefore much to be desired, that Believers should know how to distinguish, not only good Works from bad ones, but even the good Works they perform in an evangelical Manner, from those which are performed in a legal or carnal Way. That we may know which we ought to be peculiarly thankful for, and which to lament over, let me then lay down the following Marks by which to judge of those Duties that flow from Faith.

(1.) If our Obedience flows from true Faith, we are moved thereto not by *Self-will*, but by a *Regard to the Authority and Command of Christ*. Many Services we perform, merely because they suit our Inclination, fall in with our Temper or Conveniency, or because they are of our Contrivance or Invention. In this Way Persons may perform innumerable Services, excellent in themselves, and agreeable to the divine Word, and yet be little better than Will-worship; because that which spurs us on to them, animates us in them, and carries us through them, is their being done at a Time, and in a Manner, that suits to our own Tempers. But true Faith teaches us to regard and reverence the Authority of Christ: Then whatever we perform, it is because Christ commands us; and whatever we avoid, it is because Christ forbids us. The Obedience of Faith teaches us to eye Christ as our Lord and Master, and we are desirous to follow him in his Directions. We would not do any thing but by his Commission and Order, however it may suit our Inclination; and would not omit any thing he calls for, however it may cross our own Wills. Whatever we do, it is not so much to please ourselves, as to please him, who has an Authority over our Consciences, and a Love to our Souls.

(2.) If

(2.) If our Obedience flows from true Faith, we are moved thereto, not from any Thing *visible*, but from a realizing View of Things *invisible*. *We walk by Faith, not by Sight*. The Generality of Mankind are moved to do one Thing, and avoid another, because of what they see or feel; all their Motives are drawn from Things within the Verge of Nature, and within the View of Sense. But true Faith teaches a Person to look at, and live by the Things which are not seen, which are eternal: And it is a good Sign our Obedience is of the right Kind, if we are excited to it, animated and supported in it, not merely by the Applause or Fear of Man, but by a Belief of those Things which the Gospel reveals concerning Christ's Glory, Grace, Love and Salvation; all which are Things unseen.

(3.) If our Obedience flow from true Faith, we are moved thereto, not from *Self-righteousness*, but from *Love to Christ*. When we avoid Sin, or perform Duty in a right Manner, we do not think to work out a justifying Righteousness thereby, either in Whole or in Part; neither do we aim hereby to make the least Atonement for our Sins. For these Things, namely, for Pardon and Justification, we look to Christ's Blood and Righteousness alone. But we work from Love to Christ, knowing or hoping that he has loved us, and given himself for us. *The Love of Christ constraineth us*; and then *we live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us, and rose again*. Self-righteous Performances are not the Obedience of Faith; they are the direct contrary to it, as they oppose the very first fundamental Principles of the Gospel. Once more,

(4.) If our Obedience flow from true Faith, we enter upon our Duties, not in our *own Strength*, but in the
Strength

Strength of Christ. We know, we see, we feel our own utter Insufficiency to think a good Thought, or perform a good Work in a right Manner. We are conscious to ourselves, that there will be no Life nor Spirit in our Performances without the Assistance and Influence of Christ's Grace; and therefore we engage in a Duty, looking up for, and relying upon the Strength and Spirit of Christ. Whereas self-sufficient Performances betray our Ignorance of the Nature of true Holiness and spiritual Duty; and are neither acceptable to God, nor truly beneficial to ourselves.

Several more Thoughts might be added, but let these suffice; only give me Leave to recommend to you the serious Perusal of the *eleventh* Chapter to the *Hebrews*, where you will be furnished with a Variety of Instances; all which shew the Nature of the Obedience of Faith, and will teach you to judge, whether what you perform flows from true Faith or no.

I shall conclude the whole with *three* brief Reflections:

1. *How impossible is it to be truly holy, and spiritually obedient, without Faith in Christ and Union to him!* Many think that their Obedience is the Way to, and the Condition of an Interest in him. But, alas, all the Obedience we perform before Faith is Self-will, Self-righteousness and Self-sufficiency. There is not the least Degree of acceptable Obedience or true Holiness previous to an Union with Christ by Faith; and all those who talk of true Piety and Virtue, without Reliance upon Christ and Love to him, know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If any therefore are desirous to become truly holy and evangelically obedient, let it be their first Concern to fly to and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for Righteousness and Strength. We can never bring
forth

forth Fruit to God, until we are dead to the Law, and married to Christ, *Rom. vii. 4.* and we must become dead to the Law, that we might live unto God, *Gal. ii. 19.*

2. *How imperfect and defective is the Obedience of even true Believers!* It is happy indeed, when a Christian is so circumspect and conscientious in his Services, that he is blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation; when he is diligent and abundant in the Work of the Lord: But if he seriously inquired which of his Duties flowed from true Faith, and were to cast aside all those Performances that were attempted in his own Strength, with a View to his own Honour, and which he was moved to merely by his own Will, or by Things visible and sensible, there would then be but very few remaining to place among the Number of truly good Works. The Believer may say, "It is true, I have done such a Duty, attended such a Service, or resisted such a Temptation; but where has been my Love to Christ, my Dependence upon him, my View to his Glory, in such a Performance?"

If you, Believers, have your Thoughts clear, and your Eyes open to behold your own Hearts and Ways, you will find that your Works have not been *perfect*, have not been *filled up* with true Faith, Love and Affection before God, as they ought to be. This is Matter for deep and constant Humiliation.

3. *How necessary is it to put good Works in their proper Place!* If they are misplaced, they are in a Sense destroyed; all their Excellency and Value is lost. They must flow from Faith in Christ, or they are good for little.

Place them after Faith, as the Fruit and Evidence of it, and they are beautiful; they honour God, and are acceptable to him: But if they are once made the Ground
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of our Hope of Pardon and Justification, they become offensive to God, as they dishonour Christ, and overturn the Scheme of the Gospel. Let us then, all of us, be concerned to be obedient, and to perform all the Works of Righteousness that lie in our Power; only see to it that they are performed from a Sense of Christ's Love, with a View to his Glory, from a Regard to his Authority, and with a Dependence upon his Grace and Spirit.



C A S E XXVI.



S I R,

“ I HAVE attended your *Wednesday* Evening Lectures,
 “ and have heard you frequently exhorting the People
 “ to attend to the Duty of Self-examination. I ac-
 “ knowledge it is a very important Duty, and I doubt
 “ not but it is often very useful : But I find it very
 “ difficult to go through it with any Advantage to my
 “ Soul. My Heart is so averse to every Thing that
 “ is serious, especially to a Duty so close and interesting
 “ as this, that I know not how to go about it. I should
 “ be glad therefore to have it set in a proper Light ; how
 “ I must perform it ; what are the fittest Seasons for
 “ it ; how I must view it, and what use I must make
 “ of it. In thus obliging me, you may be useful to
 “ others.——

 H A T Self-examination is a Duty, appears
 evident from Scripture. *Examine yourselves,*
whether ye be in the Faith ; prove your own
selves : Know ye not your own selves, how that
Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be Reprobates ? 2 Cor. xiii.

5. A Duty, you will easily see at first View to be of
 peculiar Importance, as it tends to lay open the Heart,
 and bring us to the Knowledge of our State towards
 God. It is necessary, and esteemed an act of Prudence,
 for the Merchant to look into his Accounts, to see
 what

what Condition his worldly Concerns are in, that so he may not deceive himself, or injure others: Certainly much more is it necessary for us all to examine into the *State of our Souls*, as these are Concerns of infinite Moment; as we are all hastening to an eternal World; and a Mistake here, when Death has discharged its solemn Office, can never be rectified.

The Subject I am called to consider is weighty indeed. It concerns you all; and therefore let me intreat your serious Attention, whilst I Endeavour to answer the following Questions:

- I. *What must we examine into?*
- II. *In what Manner must we do it?*
- III. *What are the fittest Seasons for it?* And,
- IV. *In what Light must we view it, and what use should we endeavour to make of it?*

May the Answer to these Questions strike our Minds, and engage us diligently and frequently to attend to this Duty, so as may be for the Advantage of our Souls.

I. *What must we examine into?*—It will be easy to determine what must be the Matter of our Enquiry, viz. the State of our Souls, or Things relating to our Experience as Christians, in which the Glory of God, and the Peace and Welfare of our Souls are concerned. Particularly, when we set apart some Time for this Duty, we should chiefly be concerned to enquire into one or both of these Things:

1. *Whether we are real Christians or not?* And,
 2. *Whether we are growing or declining Christians.*
1. *We should enquire whether we are real Christians or not.* This is a Point of the greatest Importance. If we are Christians indeed, all Things shall go well with us, both in Life, and at Death, in Time and Eternity. But if we have only the Name, however we may live

in earthly Pleasure, it will be awful dying. *He that believeth on the Son hath ever lasting Life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see Life, but the Wrath of God abideth on him,* John iii. 36. How many have been, and are still in the melancholy State of the foolish Virgins, have the Form of Godliness, but know nothing of the Power of it? We read of the *Hope of the Hypocrite*, which shall *perish*, Job viii. 13. What will become of his Hope and him, *when God taketh away his Soul?* Job xxvii. 8. As this is the Case then, sure we should all be concerned to make a strict and solemn Enquiry, what Character we fall under, what State we are in. Would you know whether you are passed from Death unto Life, *look back to the Time when you think the Change was made, and enquire into the Circumstances attending it.* What View had you of yourself, of Sin, of Christ? Did you see your lost, miserable and wretched Condition, and was you made willing to renounce all that stood in Competition with the Redeemer, and to receive him in all his Mediatorial Characters?—Many cannot remember when the Change was made; therefore do you enquire what Evidences you can produce of the Grace of God in you. Do you hate Sin? Do you desire therefore above all Things to be delivered from it? Is it your daily Burthen? And does Heaven appear peculiarly amiable, because there Sin will be no more?—*What is your Faith?* *He that believeth shall be saved,* Matt. xvi. 16. Is Christ the Object of your Faith; Christ, as he is represented in the Gospel? Do you go to him for Righteousness to justify you, his Spirit to sanctify you, and his whole Salvation to be bestowed upon you?—*What is your Humility?* Do you appear vile in your own Eyes? Are you filled with Self-abhorrence? Do you see nothing in yourself, nothing in your Services, and are you willing to receive Sal-

Salvation as the free Gift of God, and to admire his rich distinguishing Grace in the Bestowment of it? Do you seek after a Submission to the Dispensations of his Providence, not dictating to infinite Wisdom, or censuring his Conduct, but thinking honourably of all his Ways, and desiring to say always, *Father, not my Will, but thine be done?*—*What is your Hope?* Does it lull you to Security, and encourage you to take your Ease, for all is well? Or does it put you upon Duty, enliven you in it, reconcile you to Afflictions, animate you with Zeal, and put you upon seeking after Purity of Heart and Life?—*What is your Love?* Can you say, *Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon Earth I desire besides thee?* When Christ is present, do you rejoice? When he withdraws, are your Souls grieved? When he is dishonoured, do you mourn? Do you long after clearer Views and fuller Enjoyments of Christ?—These and such-like Questions put to your Soul, when enquiring into your State.

2. *Another Subject of Enquiry is, whether we are growing or declining Christians.* Enquire, *Do you see more of the Odiousness of Sin?* Do you grow more confirmed in this great Truth, *that you are nothing?* Are your Views clearer of your Weakness and Poverty, of the Glory and Suitableness of Christ, and of the Excellency of the Gospel?—*How are your Corruptions?* Are they as prevalent as usual? Are not your Affections more mortified to the World? Does Pride possess your Breast as much as ever? Does Passion still boil in you, and lead you aside as often as before? Are you as much entangled with Lust, as easily conquered? Have you got no Victories over Sin, got no Steps forward in your Journey, added no Cubits to your spiritual Stature?—*Are you not in some measure more like your Lord?* Have you more of his divine Temper? Are you therefore more meek and

lowly in Heart, more patient and submissive to your Fathers Pleasure, more active and diligent in promoting his Glory, and more concerned to live usefully and profitably?—*In what Condition is your Faith?* Does it grow stronger? Do you feel more of its purifying Influences?—*Do you love Jesus and his People more than you did?* Are you more afraid of offending your Redeemer, more desirous of honouring him, more humble under a Sense of the little you do for him, and longing more after a better World, where you shall love and praise him for ever?—Finally, *Are you become more spiritual, more heavenly in your Temper, your Duties, your Conversation; more circumspect in your Walk;* and more concerned to fill up every Relation and Character in such a Manner, as you may adorn the Doctrine of God your Saviour in all Things?—Thus enquire into these two important Points, whether you are Christians, and what Progress you have made; whether you have Reason to say, *Oh, that it was with me as in Months past,* and so to be humbled under a Conviction of a Decline; or whether you have Reason to admire distinguishing Grace, for any Advances in Holiness, any Growth in Experience?

II. *In what manner must we examine ourselves? or how must we perform this Duty?*—If we do not attend to it in a proper Manner, it will be of no real Advantage. That the Ends of it may be answered therefore, let us,

I. *Look up to the Spirit by Prayer for his Assistance.* If you have set apart some Time for this Duty, begin with Prayer. You will have but little Satisfaction, if the Spirit is not with you. You will be ready either to draw a shade over the Work of God in your Heart, and so come from the Duty under Discouragements, or, else you will perhaps take that for real saving Experience, which

is not so, and so run into Presumption. Be earnest with God therefore to be with you; to impress you with a deep Sense of the great Importance of the Duty you are entering upon, that you may not trifle with God, and your own Soul; to enable you to examine your Heart thoroughly, and as in his Presence; and if he has given you an Experience of renewing Grace, that he would shine upon his Work, that your Evidence of the Christian may clearly appear; or if you have been deceiving yourself with false Hopes, that he would convince you of it. Wrestle with God for his Presence, if you would succeed in the Duty.

2. *Do not make Marks yourself, but observe and try yourself by those which God has given you in his Word.* Some make Marks of the Christian themselves, just as their Fancy leads them, and are either deceiving themselves by them, or else drawing uncomfortable Conclusions concerning their State. The Hypocrite thinks it is enough to attend Ordinances, and go through a Round of Duties, and so is resting upon a sandy Foundation. The Christian is ready to make a comfortable Frame, lively Affections, a warm Heart, &c. Marks of Grace, and therefore is often ready to look upon himself as an Hypocrite. Look into Scripture, and see what God has made Marks of the Christian, and do not let Fancy be your Guide in a Matter of such Importance. *Distinguish between Marks of Grace, and Marks of Growth in Grace, and apply each to their proper Subjects in your Enquiries.* For Instance, If you would know whether you are a Christian, do not enquire into the Measures or Degrees of Faith, Love, &c. but into the Reality of them. A *weak Faith* renders the Christian as safe as a strong Faith; and a *Spark* of real Love, is an Evidence of a saving Change, though it is not blown up into a Flame.

3. *Be impartial in this Duty of Self-examination.* The Christian and the Hypocrite are both ready to be too partial; the last in his own Favour, the other against himself. The Hypocrite can see *every Thing* that is encouraging; he doubts not but all is well: Whereas the Christian can see *nothing* in himself that is good. As the Woman of *Canaan* by Faith turned every Discouragement into an Argument; so the Christian, on the other hand, too often through the Power of Unbelief turns every Appearance of Grace into an Objection. Give every Thing its due Weight. Do not stop, as you are ready to do, at a View of your Imperfections. Do not say, I need go no farther, here is Evidence enough of my Hypocrisy; but go farther, and see what of the Christian you can observe, and weigh both impartially.

4. *If you can find but one Mark, you may draw a favourable Conclusion.* A real Mark of Grace is the Actings of Grace; and therefore, whenever you can see but one Mark, you may comfortably conclude that God has begun a good Work in your Heart. Should you have Reason to conclude that you *love the Brethren*, love them for the Image of Christ in them, you need not hesitate about your State: For this Love is the Exercise, or Goings-out of that Grace God has implanted. Sometimes one Mark appears visible; and sometimes another. If you have but one, be thankful, and give God all the Glory. I might add some other Directions, but I pass on to the third Question.

III. *What are the fittest Seasons for Self-examination?* It is a Duty that should be frequently attended to. *Every Day* we should be looking within, and taking a View of our Hearts. *At the Conclusion of the Day*, we should be concerned to ask our Souls such Questions

as these—How have I spent this Day?—What Sins have I fallen into?—What Frame have I been in?—What Advantage have I gained in my Way to Zion?—*When we have been reading the Word*, it will be proper to examine ourselves by it, what we have seen in it, what we have experienced of it, and how we may improve it.—*After Prayer*, we may enquire into our Frame, our Views, and our Experience in Prayer.—These and many other Opportunities God in his Providence is giving us to look into ourselves.—But there are Seasons more peculiarly set apart for Self-examination, when we should look back upon many Years, compare the Frames and Experiences of one Year with those of another, see how God has been dealing with us, that we may come to some conclusion Concerning our State.—I shall only mention here these three Hints, as they will be some Direction to us as to proper Seasons.

1. *When we have most Time to go through this Duty.* It should not be hurried over, but attended to with the greatest Deliberation, because it relates to the State of our Souls. We should therefore endeavour to set apart as much Time as we can, that our Minds may be composed, that we may not trifle with God or our own Souls, but may attend with that Solidity and Seriousness which the Subject requires, and may take a thorough View of Things. Let not this lead you to a constant Neglect of the Duty, pleading as an Excuse, that you have not proper Time for it; but let it rather put you upon striving to order your Affairs so, that you may have these Opportunities frequently returning.—

2. *When our Thoughts are like to be most disengaged from this World, and we freest from Interruption.*—As the Week Days do not afford us many Opportunities for this Duty, we should often fix upon the *Lord's Day*.

Now

Now we are free from Business, we hear the Word, and engage in spiritual Duties, all which tend to bring us into a serious and composed Frame. When you have been to God's House, then retire into your Closet in the Afternoon, shut the Door about you, and there not only call over the Word you have heard, and look into your present Frame, but set yourself upon this solemn Work, look back and take an impartial View of Things, and try to come at a Knowledge of your State and Experience. Any other Day likewise, when you find yourself in a serious Frame, separate an Hour for this important Purpose.—

3. *When any Thing in Providence more peculiarly calls us to this Work.*—Here I would mention three Seasons that seem to invite you to this Duty—*When you are going to wait upon Christ at his Supper*—For this you have the Direction of the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. ii. 28.—This is *a publick Surrender to God*, and therefore you should enquire whether you are heartily willing to give up yourself wholly to Christ.—This Ordinance is designed peculiarly for the People of God. It is necessary therefore that you should enquire whether you are one or not, lest you should take that which God has designed for his own Children.—*Another Season is Afflictions.* This Duty seems proper to be attended to, when God's Hand is upon us. Many are ready to think Afflictions inconsistent with God's Love. Enquire therefore *whether you are a Christian or not*; it may be a Means of supporting your Soul, whilst you see the Rod in a Father's Hand.—*Enquire into your Sins.* Perhaps you may hereby see the Cause of your Afflictions, and see Matter for Humiliation, as well as be made sensible of the Ends God has in View in afflicting you, and so be directed in the Way of your Duty.—Lastly, *Another Season proper for this Duty is, when Eternity is approaching.*—Then, as good old Jacob, you should view the Conduct of divine Providence to-
wards

wards you, and see what appears in your whole Life as an Evidence of the Christian. How happy will it be, if, upon a diligent Examination, you should be enabled through Grace to say, *I have fought the good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness!* How pleasant will it be to die! How will your Soul long to hear the Chariot Wheels of your Redeemer coming!—And on the other Hand, if you are not a Christian, to die in this State will be inconceivably awful. And how happy to be made sensible of it, and find your Soul willing to fly to Jesus, if it be but at the last Hour!—Thus these appear to be all fit Seasons for this important Duty.—Let us now consider the last Question.

IV. *In what Light must we view this Duty, and what Use should we endeavour to make of it?* Some look upon, and represent Self-examination as legal, and that Comfort that arises from Marks and Evidences as not truly evangelical: But Objections of this Kind will fall to the Ground, when we consider the following Particulars.—

I. *Self-examination is not designed to make us proud, but to fill us with Admiration.* This Use we are to make of it. If in this Duty any Marks and Evidences of the Christian appear, we must not be lifted up, as if we were something; but be humble, giving God all the Glory. This is the Improvement which the Christian desires to make of this Duty; this is the Frame it leads him into. Has he any Reason to conclude that he is a Child of God? See how his Soul is melted with a View of the Grace of God—“Oh, why should God look upon
“a Creature so unworthy! Am I indeed a Christian?
“Need I not dispute it? Is there a Change made in my
“Heart? Oh, what Grace, what Grace that which
“God

“ God has manifested to me ! what Grace to pluck me
“ as a Brand out of the Fire ! View it, my Soul, and
“ ever adore and admire.”

2. *Self-examination is not to lull us to Security, but to quicken us.* Do any Marks of the Christian appear ? We must not say, *Soul, take thine Ease, eat, drink and be merry.* Thou art a Child of God, and nothing can ever cast thee out of his Favour. They that draw such Conclusions have never yet received the Grace of God. A View of God's Love to us should, and will quicken and enliven us in Duty.—“ Oh, what shall I render unto the
“ Lord for such distinguishing Grace ? O love the Lord,
“ O my Soul, and never loiter in the Service of him,
“ who has laid thee under such peculiar Obligations to
“ love and honour him for ever.” If no Marks appear, and we have Reason to conclude that we are not Christians, this should rouse and alarm us, and stir us up to seek after an Acquaintance with the divine Life.

3. *We must not depend upon this Duty for Justification, but use it as a Means to promote our Comfort and Sanctification.* If we can see any Traces of the Image of God in us, we have Reason to rejoice. For this Purpose it is that the Spirit comes, and lets the Soul see his Interest in the Redeemer ; it is that we may rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory. And who cannot, who does not, at such a Discovery ? As this View fills the Soul with Joy, so it gives him a Hatred of Sin, melts him into godly Sorrow, subdues the Power of Sin more and more in him, and so promotes his Sanctification. If we have not these Ends in View in this Duty ; if we think we have now enough to justify us before God, and so depend upon our own Righteousness for eternal Life, we give no Evidence that we have experienced a saving Work in our Souls.

4. *After*

4. *After all therefore we should keep close to Christ, looking to him for all Righteousness for Justification, and all Strength and Grace for Sanctification.* If all is dark within, and we can see nothing to encourage us to conclude that we are the Children of God, yet be not dejected, but look to Christ. Our Salvation does not depend upon our seeing ourselves Christians, but upon our being united to Christ. Do not be discouraged; this is not the Ground of your Hope, but only the Means of your Comfort. — If we find what we seek after, *viz.* the Marks of the Christian; yet, whilst we are rejoicing that we are the Heirs of God, let us depend upon Christ for Righteousness to justify us, for all Grace and Strength to enable us to persevere in Faith and Holiness, till we come to the full and everlasting Enjoyment of him in Heaven. Thus we are to improve this Duty. Hence,

Let me ask you concerning this Duty, Are there not some of you, who have never yet examined how the Case stands with you? Do not your Consciences upbraid you with Negligence? Do you not blush at your Folly? Do you please yourselves with the Thoughts that Man sees you not in your Closets, that your Friends know not but you are engaged in Duty? But, alas, alas, what a poor Comfort is this! when God knows and sees your Neglect, you yourselves are conscious of it, your Souls are starving, Eternity is drawing near, and yet you know not how it is with you. You are careful as to outward Things, pursuing Pleasure, Wealth; but have never yet sat down and asked, Am I fit to die? How is it with my Soul? Oh, my Friends, if you have any Regard for your Peace, your Happiness in Life, at Death, make the Inquiry how it is with you? It is a reasonable Request I ask. It is with a Desire after your Salvation.

Salvation. To-morrow you may be in Eternity. There is much to be done before you are fit to die; and yet see, you have not asked a single Question seriously about it! It is Time to awake. Thinkest thou to sleep on so till Death approaches? Was it not for thy Soul, sleep on: But to see an immortal Creature in Danger of falling into everlasting Fire is enough to raise my Compassion, and calls loudly upon me to endeavour to rouse thee. Awake, awake, O Soul, get up and examine thyself.—Some of you may be afraid to look within, afraid to see what is there. You are suspicious that Things are bad, and you would avoid the Sight, you would fly from it; but, oh, you cannot. Should you stifle Conscience, and lull it asleep for the present; yet the Time is coming when you can no longer withstand the Force of Conviction; when Conscience will awake, and fill you with everlasting Sorrows, if found Strangers to Christ. Oh, inquire then what is the State of your Souls!

As God has now brought us to the Close of this Lecture, so it may not be improper for each of us to examine into our Views, Frames in it, and Improvements of it. — Let us, my dear Brother, inquire, what Ends we have had in View in engaging in it? How have we attended to it? with Seriousness, with an affectionate Concern for Souls, with earnest Prayer for Assistance and Success? — Do you examine, who have attended ~~this~~ Lecture? — What Frame have you attended in? What were your Views, only to gratify a vain Curiosity, or to meet with Jesus, to have your Doubts resolved, and your Souls brought nearer to God? What Benefit have you received? Have you seen more of your own Hearts, more of the Suitableness and Glory of Christ, and been more and more established and grounded in the Faith?

—Thus

—Thus let us all be examining into the State and Frame of our Souls. — Let this be our frequent Employment; and let us rejoice more in the Prospect of that World, where all our Cases of Conscience will be fully answered, every dark Cloud for ever scattered; where every Fear will vanish, and our Souls be possessed of compleat and uninterrupted Happiness in the everlasting Enjoyment of God. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

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